The Years Between

The Mysterious Cavalier

Feval and Lassez

G.B.T. Hollenberg Jr

THE YEARS BETWEEN

ADVENTURES *of* D'ARTAGNAN *and* CYRANO DE BERGERAC

I. THE MYSTERIOUS CAVALIER
II. MARTYR TO THE QUEEN

THE MYSTERIOUS CAVALIER

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THE MYSTERIOUS CAVALIER

BY

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AND

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FEVAL & LASSEZ
THE MYSTERIOUS CAVALIER

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PREFACE

AN OVERSIGHT ON THE PART OF ALEXANDER DUMAS

WHO does not remember the preface to *The Three Musketeers?*

In it, the great Dumas tells how, after reading the *Memoirs of M. d'Artagnan,* he was struck by the "mythological" sound of the names *Athos, Aramis,* and *Porthos,* and became curious to discover the real identity of these persons, so obviously disguised. His investigations would have been fruitless had not the learned Paulin Pâris told him of the existence of a folio manuscript. It was numbered, he said, 4772 or 4773, and was entitled: *Memoirs of the Comte de la Fère, concerning certain events that happened in France toward the end of the reign of Louis XIII and the beginning of the reign of Louis XIV.* It was the first part of this precious manuscript that the novelist announced he was offering to his readers; he promised, it will be remembered, to publish the second if the first was well received.

Dumas boasted freely that he sometimes changed the original, but never without improving on it. This modest disavowal of authorship has always been received with a good deal of scepticism. Furthermore, a surprising gap between the stories started us thinking. Here M. Lassez and I wish to recall to all faithful readers of the works of the great novelist something which must often have occurred to them: Why did Dumas leave an interval of twenty years between *The Three Musketeers* and its sequels? Why is it that the preface does not enlighten us on this point? Must we admit that the heroes of these novels slept from 1628 to 1648 without performing a single noteworthy deed, and that at a time when they still enjoyed the vigor of youth? Did Athos suffer a complete loss of memory concerning a twenty-year period in the lives of his inseparable companions? This last hypothesis is not tenable since, as we have seen, the manuscript states that the events chronicled took place "toward the end of the reign of Louis XIII"—who died in 1643, sixteen years after the end of *The Three Musketeers.*

No, this troubled period, fertile in romantic incidents, could not have been the time that our noble young friends chose to hang their trusty swords on a nail! These years saw the end of the Great Cardinal, and the obscure beginnings of the fortunes of Giulio Mazarini; the death of Louis the Just, and the new loves of the Queen.

This enigmatic silence, we felt, must hide some mystery forgotten or disregarded by our illustrious predecessor—an entire novel, perhaps, based upon the *Memoirs of the Comte de la Fère.* Spurred on by this dream of a lost masterpiece buried, like a diamond, in the silent dust of the department of manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale, we ventured one day to awaken the famous folios from their long sleep.

"Numbers 4772 and 4773!" exclaimed the old librarian. "Ah, this is the first time . . . since the theft. . . ."

"What theft?"

The good man turned a deaf ear to us.

A few moments later we were able to verify the fact that the first manuscript stopped with the year 1628—as did *The Three Musketeers;* and that the second volume began in 1648—twenty years after!

"Ah!" remarked the librarian, noticing our obvious perplexity, "I am told that in April, 1848, following the February uprisings, M. Dumas returned here with several friends to consult the third folio. . . ."

"Then there was a third folio?"

"Of course, 4772A. It was in a different writing from these two before you. But M. Dumas made a fatal mistake in overlooking this volume on his former visits. He could not find it again. The troops who camped here on the night of February 24 must have taken it away with them."

THE following summer, on a walking trip through Vendée, we stopped at Caillère at the home of the hospitable squire Nermoveaux.

"Why don't you spend the summer in this district?" he suggested.

"If only there were a little place that we might rent!"

At that moment a prosperous looking landowner came up and shook the squire's hand.

"Parbleu!" cried the latter, "here's your chance. Rent Grimaud's little château."

Grimaud! What a train of memories this name called up. Now that we had been forced to leave the musketeers to their sleep of twenty years, it seemed an unkind fate that reminded us of our vanished hopes. Amused by our silence, the cause of which he seemed to guess, the squire added quietly:

"You two who are writers must certainly have read Dumas' *The Three Musketeers?* . . . Yes, of course. Well, this Grimaud is a direct descendant of the quiet servant of Athos. He has some interesting old documents in his house. In rainy weather it might amuse you to look them over."

Turning to the newcomer, we ventured to ask:

"You don't possibly have 4772A?"

The quiet man suddenly became voluble:

"Yes, I have it! Written in the hand of my ancestor. My father recovered it in 1848."

"Recovered it? What do you mean?"

"It's a long story! It seems that before dying, Monsieur le Comte called my ancestor to him and said: 'Grimaud, you have written too much from my dictation. You must destroy the manuscript that explains the mystery of the garden of Amiens. The Queen's name must not be sullied!' "

"And you have this manuscript?"

"Yes, indeed. It's most fascinating."

That evening we were settled in Grimaud's château. To think that through this unexpected coincidence we were now reading the authentic narrative of those fascinating years!

The manuscript consisted of an outline of a story told to his master by the youngest of the Musketeers: "concerning certain secret adventures and mysterious relations between M. d'Artagnan and M. Cyrano de Bergerac."

Less fortunate than Dumas, we cannot claim to have given more than a transcription of Grimaud's narrative. There is a great difference between the eloquent memoirs of a gentleman and the summary account of a servant. Nevertheless, we hope that the reader will be able to live again with those immortal heroes: d'Artagnan and Cyrano.

PAUL FEVAL, *fils*

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THE MYSTERIOUS CAVALIER

THE MYSTERIOUS CAVALIER

CHAPTER I

A GENTLEMAN AND HIS NOSE

One morning in April 1641—when Louis XIII wore the crown of France, and Armand Duplessis, Cardinal-Duke de Richelieu, was in power—the guards on duty at the *Capitainerie* of the Louvre saw a young man of military bearing cross over from the *Quai de l'Ecole* and walk swiftly and gracefully towards them.

The newcomer wore a doublet with buff collar, encircled by a leather shoulder-belt; his large boots reached above the knees, and his tall hat with upturned brim boasted but a single bunch of feathers. This constituted the military uniform of the soldiers in the Flemish campaign. A long, slender rapier, in rounded sheath, hung from his belt, completing the martial costume.

Approaching the sentries he saluted with a flourish and abruptly said: "Greetings, comrade! Can you tell me if M. de Guitaut is in the Palace?"

The man questioned was a handsome guard in full-dress uniform wearing a gaily decorated coat and a hat with a tremendous plume. Without deigning to answer, he surveyed the intrepid young soldier who, still in boots and spurs, dared to present himself at the Palace of the King as if he were at camp. He deluded himself, apparently, with the absurd hope that, thus attired, he could be admitted into the presence of the Captain of the Queen's Guards.

But patience was not one of the young soldier's outstanding virtues. Finding himself exposed to a critical examination, he wrinkled his brow, bit his lips, and curtly repeated his question:

"Well, Sir! Again I ask you if I may see M. de Guitaut?"

"Speak to the officer in charge," answered the other, turning his back.

The soldier hesitated a moment. He wondered whether, before passing on, he should demand satisfaction for this impertinence. But, on reflection, he decided that it was better to ignore it. Turning quickly away, he walked resolutely through a wicket-gate into a small court-yard, where an officer shining with gold and lace, was amusing himself by teasing the horses attached to a carriage. The noble animals, irritated by a long wait, pawed the ground and pulled at their reins, to the great amusement of the lackeys and of a ponderous coachman.

The young man saluted once more and announced his mission.

"The King is at Chantilly and the Queen is making a retreat at the Convent of the Carmelites. It would be rather surprising if M. de Guitaut were in the Louvre, where there's nothing for him to do!"

Such was the officer's answer; in making it, he hardly deigned to turn his head toward the intruder.

"What miserable luck! Really, I had no way of foreseeing this," answered the young soldier in a lively tone of voice. "However, because of the importance and urgency of my communication, I cannot be satisfied with such an ambiguous answer. I beg you, Monsieur, to announce to M. de Guitaut—or, if that be impossible, to his nephew M. de Comminges—that I am waiting here, and desire to see him at once."

This speech was delivered with such assurance that the officer decided to leave the coach-horses and examine this messenger who, though little acquainted with the usages of the Court, seemed so sure of himself. Before him stood a fine-looking youth in the flower of his budding manhood. The bearer of this unusual request still preserved the fresh complexion and frank expression of a boy. Yet beneath this apparent immaturity there was a certain bold fearlessness. The fiery young fellow was very handsome, with slim body, lithe muscles, and oval face, framed in chestnut locks. He had large, clear eyes, and a pleasant smile played over his proud lips (as yet scarcely shadowed by a light down), and brightened his countenance. Everything about him indicated a gentleman of rank rather than the poor soldier of fortune that his costume suggested.

Won over by the appearance of the lad, the officer took the letter which was proffered, and disappeared up a little stairway leading to the Queen's apartments. Left to himself, the young soldier examined the spirited horses, and the magnificent carriage, with its emblazoned panels, brocade decorations and silk cushions. To his eyes, little accustomed to such splendor, it seemed to be the chariot of some fairy. And, in faith! wasn't this a fairy who had just appeared, descending the little stairway? A beautiful, golden-haired fairy, with blue, dreamy eyes, and a lily-white complexion! Lightly, scarcely touching the ground, she came towards him.

Before the lackeys had a chance to anticipate her, the charming lady herself opened the door. She was about to step into the carriage when the horses, restive from their long wait, started without warning. The equilibrium of fairies is subject to the same laws as that of mortals. The pretty, imprudent girl slipped on the carriage step and fell backwards, uttering a startled cry. But the soldier darted forward, and was rewarded for his gallant action by receiving in his arms the most agreeable burden of a soft, lovely body which was entirely dependent on him for support. Blushing and confused on account of her awkwardness, the young lady thanked her impromptu cavalier with a smile. He, for his part, less confused but redder of cheek, murmured a vague reply.

All this lasted but a second—just time enough for a glance and a smile. Yet the eyes of a sixteen-year-old maiden are sharp, and this short time sufficed for her to notice the handsome bearing of the soldier. And the gallant youth had received a ravishing vision of beauty which combined an impudent, fairy-like vivacity with the tender and delicate charm of a young girl. The impression made was profound—he still felt her in his arms, even after the carriage had disappeared through the gate.

The handsome guard had been the sole witness of this short scene. Having seen how well the young man's message had been received by his superior officer, he regretted his scornful attitude, and approached the soldier in a conciliatory manner.

"Ah ha, my friend," he said, winking, "it's not every young man who is as fortunate in his first few minutes at Court."

"Who is the young lady?" asked the soldier, finally drawn out of his reverie.

"A fine slip of a girl, eh? And lively as a lark! She's one of the Queen's attendants."

The young man could only sigh: "How beautiful she is!"

At this moment the officer on duty reappeared. He was accompanied by a tall man, elegantly dressed. The latter held in his hand a letter which the soldier recognized as his own.

"Is *he* the messenger?" inquired the gentleman in a surprised tone.

"Yes, M. le Comte."

M. de Comminges, the nephew of M. de Guitaut and lieutenant of the Guards, stared fixedly at the person who was pointed out to him as if he wished to engrave his features on his mind. He then began to question the soldier:

"It is you, Monsieur, who ask for M. de Guitaut?"

"Yes, Monsieur, it is I."

The lieutenant continued, somewhat agitated in spite of his effort to appear calm: "And it was you who wrote this letter?"

The young man nodded.

"M. de Guitaut is not in the Louvre. He was not supposed to come at all to-day, but do not let that dishearten you, because I shall deliver your message to him at once. I do not doubt that, having read it, he will hasten to see you. I beg you, then, to return here this evening at five o'clock."

"Without fail!" answered the young man.

Then, in a low voice, he asked:

"Should I bring with me . . . 'the object'?"

Comminges seemed embarrassed. After a moment's hesitation he replied:

"No, there's no point in bringing it yet. M. de Guitaut will see you first—that is a better arrangement. Then he will give you instructions about . . . 'the object' in question!"

Then, quickly, he added:

"You have spoken to no one about this, I trust?"

"You are the first person I have seen since my arrival."

"Splendid! Continue to be discreet. Above all, be on your guard. Be careful, and remember that we await you this evening. . . ."

"At five o'clock, I shall be here!"

The lieutenant extended his hand to the young soldier, who took it respectfully, but without embarrassment.

"Until this evening, then!"

"Until this evening!"

The young man, whose unexpected arrival so excited the lieutenant of the Queen's Guards, left the Louvre with the same alert and firm step with which he had entered.

"Cavalier," said the young man to himself as he walked away, "you were not deceived. Your reception at the

Palace was most satisfactory. . . . Things seem to be starting well. And yet you've only seen M. de Comminges. What will happen when, instead of the nephew, you see the uncle? The captain instead of the lieutenant? . . . Ah! We shall then see the real effect of my talisman. Meantime I must while away an entire afternoon. What can I do? Except for my landlady on the Rue de la Montagne Sainte Geneviève, I don't know a single soul in this immense city of Paris."

The Cavalier—let us give him this name, rather than any other, because, after all, it is the one he himself just used—the Cavalier, when this thought seized him, checked his pace. From the place where he was he had the choice of two roads. By turning to the right, past the Port au Foin and the Porte-Neuve, he could reach the Tuileries and the Cours la Reine, with the fashionable new walks. But this would mean retracing his steps past the Louvre. To the left was the Pont-Neuf. From where he stood he could see the innumerable booths on either side of the bridge. Near him was the Samaritaine with its ornamented gables, surmounted by a clock-tower; on the other end of the bridge the little Château-Gaillard raised its Gothic turrets.

"Zounds! The Pont-Neuf wins!" he decided after a brief deliberation. "But first let's have lunch at this little inn. *The Three Marys,* what an engaging name! Afterwards, we'll salute the statue of good King Henry, patron of all soldiers of fortune, and have a look at the famous Samaritaine."

The Pont-Neuf, built only thirty years before, still merited its title of "new." It was the meeting place for all idlers—of whom there has never been a dearth in Paris. A saying of the time shows the number and variety of persons to be found there: "One can never cross the Pont-Neuf without meeting *a girl, a monk, and a white horse.*" Indeed, on this lovely spring day, there was no lack of girls. Here was a nimble chamber-maid in light jacket and white bonnet; there a graceful damsel with Florentine mask, wearing a low-cut bodice and large farthingdale. Several monks might be seen among the idlers who watched the various entertainments. And as for white horses, plenty of them were struggling to draw carriages along the narrow, dirty way. Their passage was blocked by numerous sedan-chairs and handsome gallants on Spanish jennets.

This motley crowd, in which gentlemen, common people, and soldiers elbowed one another, and in which, naturally, there was no lack of beggars and pick-pockets, circulated endlessly along the fronts of the booths. Here one might purchase everything. Book-stalls and the hovels of old-clothes dealers adjoined shops of dealers in salves and ointments. The crowd was always thickest in front of the numerous free entertainments, which gave this place the aspect of a perpetual fair. In fact there was an embarrassingly large number of attractions: here the celebrated Mondor retailed his "Orvietan"—"the universal drug"; next to this stand was a lottery—"draw the white and you win"; farther on, Master Gonin amazed his audience with juggling tricks. Only one man, they said, was cleverer than Gonin in slight-of-hand; but this rival worked before a larger audience—his name was Monsieur the Cardinal Richelieu. Such, at least, was the feeling of the public, which was never willing to give up its right to criticize. And here, finally, one could hear the strolling bards read the new satirical verses—popularly entitled "pont-neufs." One must not forget that at this period Paris still remembered the uprisings of the Ligue (in which more than one old man still alive had taken part), and that it was the eve of the Fronde. Many of these young gallants with their Spanish swagger, waxed moustaches, and rakish swords, were to play their part in the forthcoming conflict.

The movements of this roistering crowd made a great din. The rumbling of wheels and the grinding of brakes formed a constant bass, to which was added an unharmonious succession of notes: the gibes of the clowns, the beating of large drums, the shrill giggles of girls, the cries of the unwary as their handkerchiefs were stolen. All this noise, mingling in a great holiday din, rose about the statue of good King Henry, who, seated solemnly on his bronze horse in the midst of the mob, seemed to preside over the joyous frolic.

The chimes of the Samaritaine sounded two o'clock and the hubbub was fast becoming deafening when the young Cavalier, fortified by a plentiful luncheon, reached the Pont-Neuf. His wide-eyed interest in all that happened betrayed a young man lately arrived from the country. Everything to him was a source of wonder. Forced to slow down, he allowed himself to be jostled by the crowd, and was often amused when some pretty girl was pushed against him. He enjoyed it all hugely, admiring shop-windows and gaping at passers-by, pushing and being pushed, until at last he arrived at an open square. There he stopped to examine more closely the statue of King Henry, placed on an immense pedestal, and strangely flanked by four bound slaves.

As he started towards another position from which to examine the statue more closely, he failed to notice a strange-looking man who was coming in his direction, walking rapidly and fingering with attention the pages of a book, which seemed greatly to interest him. And so, since the Cavalier was absorbed in the statue and the newcomer in his book, a collision was inevitable. With such force did they meet that the young man in his absorption for a moment thought he had been struck by a cannon-ball and instinctively he lurched to one side.

Turning quickly around, he found himself face to face with the reader who had thus so unhappily introduced himself. Or, rather, he found himself facing . . . a book. The Cavalier, as we have already seen, was not the most patient of mortals. He did not stop to wonder if such heedlessness was caused by deep preoccupation, or by studied insolence. Bent on getting the satisfaction that his wounded hip demanded, he placed himself firmly in front of the stranger. The reader appeared surprised at the stubbornness which had placed such an obstacle in his way, but he did not allow a mere trifle to keep him from his absorbing occupation. With a mechanical motion of the arm he tried to push aside this impeding object.

This was too much. The young man, purple with rage, cried out rudely:

"You, there! Wait a minute. If you keep on in this way, I'll break your . . ."

He was never to finish the sentence. The other finally decided to raise his eyes, and the Cavalier, seeing his face for the first time, stood gaping in surprise. What dumbfounded the angry young soldier was not the amusing bewilderment of the reader on seeing a man in front of him; nor the astonished manner in which, slowly collecting his wits, he became aware that he was on earth, in the middle of the Pont-Neuf, thousands of miles from those regions in which his fancy had been wandering. No! Even this, diverting as it was, was not the reason! The cause of the Cavalier's amazement was . . .

But, before giving the reason, it might be well to examine more closely this strange personage. Imagine a huge devil, with body put together in a most haphazard fashion, tall and awkward, with long legs and a stomach which, out of pure contradictoriness, extended inward instead of outward. Above this extraordinary stomach was a massive chest, from which hung down long, drooping arms that resembled the wings of a windmill.

His dress was as incongruous as the body it covered. Dark colored and severely cut, at first glance it resembled the habit of a scholar. But a double collar of Genoese lace, bows of ribbon and frilled cuffs pointed rather to a courtier. The large hat with its slender plume had an unmistakably military air.

Was he a bravo? One of those professional bullies who were so common in that hey-day of duelling? If so, how was one to account for the books he carried, and the odds and ends of paper which stuck out of his pockets? Surely he must be a scholar, a poet, or perhaps a printer—or, still better, a travelling bookseller. But, good heavens, no! The haughty face and proud look were those of a gentleman of rank.

Well, aside from all that, was he young or old, handsome or ugly? Difficult questions to answer. Yet, taken all in all, he seemed to be young, although his hair was thinning and his sad smile bore a disillusioned expression. Handsome? No! Attractive? Yes—with the broad forehead of a thinker, eyes sparkling under a shaggy brow, and mouth touched with a condescending benevolence. Bold, brave, noble? Yes—and with a little touch of the extravagant.

Yet, alas, extended as this description may appear, we have not mentioned the most important feature of the man. In the very middle of the face of this gentleman and scholar there arose something so strange and incongruous as to explain everything else about him. The possessor of this anomaly could never have lacked distinction! This—what shall we call it?—was a mass of flesh, large at the base, long and curved toward the end, not unlike the beak of a parrot. It was, in short, a nose, an extraordinary nose, both sad and comic, disquieting and pitiful, which the Cavalier suddenly beheld. It was because of this that, dumbfounded, he had been unable to finish the sentence he had so glibly started.

At last awakened from his reverie, this strange person had the air of a man just arrived from the moon.

"Monsieur," he said in an annoyed tone of voice, "did I by any chance bump into you?"

Though still red with anger, the Cavalier felt already pacified. Instead of wanting to kill the man he felt a tremendous desire to laugh.

"Well, I do remember feeling something," he said lightly, rubbing his side.

The man from the moon in his turn became conscious of the young soldier's charm, and smiled as he answered with a bow:

"I beg you to accept my apologies."

"Oh, that's quite unnecessary, I assure you. And for my part I withdraw my ill-timed expression."

The stranger's brow became clouded:

"Indeed! and what did you say?"

The soldier kept an embarrassed silence. One doesn't speak of the noose in a condemned man's cell. Should he mention this . . . this "infirmity" to such an agreeable gentleman? Finally he answered:

"Nothing at all—just some stupid remark."

"That's good," said the tall man, as, with a low bow, he left the young soldier.

"There's a well-bred youth," the stranger thought to himself as he walked along. "I like his frank face! What a shame if I had been forced to hurt such a fine little soldier!"

The hot-headed Cavalier also spoke to himself, but in a chiding manner:

"Well, now, is this the way you follow the prudent advice of M. l'Abbé and of M. de Comminges? From the way I handled that affair, if I had met a professional fighter I should have had a duel on my hands. Luckily this gentleman was gracious and patient despite his military bearing."

The noise of a carriage going by at full gallop drew the Cavalier from these reflections. 'He was just able to jump backward in time to avoid the horses. Yet, this done, he remained transfixed on the spot. In spite of the dirt and mud thrown up by the carriage, he recognized the brilliant equipage he had seen earlier in the day at the Louvre. But, even more important, he had seen at the carriage window, looking his way, the lovely face of his fair unknown. Had she caught a glimpse of him in that fleeting second? He thought that her clear eyes and pretty mouth had lighted up with a smile. An illusion, perhaps. Before he could recover from his stupor, the heavy carriage had disappeared past the dark walls of the Hôtel de Nevers.

Drawn by an irresistible impulse, the Cavalier hastened after the carriage. When he reached the end of the bridge he saw that it had stopped at the bottom of a narrow little street, densely shaded by large trees that formed a green canopy over it. Through the open carriage door appeared the silhouette of the lovely girl who seemed scarcely to touch the steps as she descended and disappeared through a little door in the high wall.

This charming apparition had been lost to sight for some time, yet the impulsive youth remained where he stood, his eyes lost in the darkness of the little street. A sudden burst of laughter behind him recalled him to the realities of life. He looked around, and realized that all the time that he had been absorbed in his contemplation he had turned his back on a platform on which a curious performance was taking place. Strange-looking actors were gesticulating and bantering and chaffing one another with such vivacity that the audience was kept in gales of laughter. Having nothing in particular to do, the Cavalier watched the performance over the heads of the idlers who had collected.

"This, at least, is a peaceful occupation," he said to himself. "Here I won't be tempted to forget that prudent conduct which had been so impressed upon me."

For in truth the lovely vision he had just seen did not keep him from remembering his strange encounter with the tall gentleman, and his narrow escape from an annoying conflict. So, quite happy now in his newly discovered wisdom, he gave all his attention to the buffoons. There were three of them and each was worth his weight in gold.

The first was none other than the famous Sieur Brioché, proprietor of the show and Master of Marionnettes "by permission of the King." He was a dignified, facile person, whose tongue dripped erudite words, and who exhibited the satisfied air of the good bourgeois who owns his own house.

And then what a contrast! At his side was an assistant, dressed in a strange costume, half yellow, half green. This evil-looking devil, with his pale face in which glittered a malicious eye, loved to embarrass his master with various ridiculous, offensive, and often indecent questions. He accompanied his jokes with appropriate buffoonery, and continued to juggle with a large, broad-brimmed hat, which he transformed into the most unexpected shapes. Within a few minutes it had been the square hat of a professor at the Sorbonne, the headdress of a medical student, the large hat of a gentleman of fashion, and, finally, a very irreverent imitation of a Cardinal's hat—this suggestion of Richelieu sent the audience into repeated gales of laughter.

The third member of the group was a monkey—silent, but shrewd. It was a terrible, grimacing monkey, vicious and wicked, always trying to discover some new deviltry. The animal was clever in pulling out handkerchiefs, stealing candy, pinching men, and tickling women.

The motley crowd, massed around the platform, seemed to derive the greatest pleasure from the gibes of the clown, the contortions of the monkey, and the pithy speeches of the proprietor. With boisterous informality the audience joined in the fun, and there was a constant give-and-take between actors and spectators.

Suddenly a malicious gleam sparkled in the clown's eye, as he looked steadily at something in one of the back rows. There was a sudden, complete silence. What had he discovered? He certainly must be preparing some tremendous bit of foolery. The buffoon, well knowing how to pique the curiosity of his audience, preserved a bewildered attitude for several seconds. Then, suddenly pointing his finger at a certain spot, he said in a humorously provocative tone of voice:

"You, Sir Cavalier, there! Step back a bit, if you don't mind; I can't see Notre Dame."

Every one immediately turned around to stare at the gentleman in question, and, after one short look, a mad gaiety seized the crowd. The Cavalier, of course, looked with the rest, and was amazed to recognize as the object of this mirth and the centre of so many stares the unmistakable figure of the preoccupied reader. Standing quietly in the back of the crowd, the strange man had been watching the performance. At first he did not seem to understand that the clown was addressing him. This only served to increase the amusement of the crowd.

The clown began again, this time in a tone of humble supplication:

"My dear Sir, if you don't feel that you can move, would you mind taking away that thing which obstructs my view of the sky?"

On hearing this gross buffoonery, the Cavalier began to feel uneasy, and feared for the outcome. A slight frown appeared on the forehead of the man whom the clown had addressed. He looked at the amused crowd with a quiet glance, and merely said:

"What thing?"

"Why," replied the fool, pretending to be slightly embarrassed, "that growth on your face; that . . . well, that . . ."

"Nose!" cut in the gentleman in his quiet voice.

"Ah, yes! parbleu! that's it, that's exactly it!" said the other, pretending to be greatly relieved.

The stranger gave a scornful look at the clown, and then said very gravely:

"I can't get it off. It's a family heirloom. I shall keep it."

This unexpected retort was greeted with uproarious laughter. For once in his life the clown was beaten. He had found his master in repartee.

The young soldier noticed the hit.

"Well answered," he said to himself. "This bookworm has a clever tongue."

However, the clown could not allow himself to be surpassed. His popularity was at stake. He became restless and lost some of his presence of mind under the cool stare of his adversary. With difficulty he assumed his insolent manner. Squinting comically at the tall gentleman, he set his hat at a defiant angle, and then spoke in a very sanctimonious fashion:

"My master," he began, addressing the grave Brioché, "you who are the font and source of all wisdom; you who know the Latin names for 'spaniel' and 'rabbit'; you who understand the logic of the toadstool and the mushroom . . . can you tell me what is the most noble part of the human body?"

"Ah, I see, you are about to give us another of your vile witticisms."

"For once you are wrong, and your fears without foundation."

The master raised his head, and began to discourse in a most pedantic manner. Reinforcing his speech with quotations from Greek and Latin writers, he gave a prodigious dissertation on the respective merits of each part of the human body.

"Oh, no, no, no! You're absolutely wrong," broke in the clown with an air of deep commiseration.

Pointing to the horrible monkey which was making faces over his shoulder, he added:

"Look at my brother here. . . . Doesn't he look exactly like you?"

Brioché drew back in horror, thus adding a further comic touch to the scene.

"You see," continued the clown, "he has, like you, a tongue, eyes, ears, and, to show that he can go you even one better, four hands—and a tail. I challenge you to prove the contrary."

The audience bubbled with laughter.

"Well, then, do you know what this monkey does *not* have?"

The buffoon paused a moment while he looked over the crowd to catch the eye of his erstwhile adversary. Finding the man's stare fixed steadfastly on him, he gave him an insolent glance, quick and sharp, like the thrust from a stiletto.

"What he lacks," he cried out boastingly, "well . . . I'll tell you. It's a . . ."

"Nose," came the clear, dry voice of the gentleman.

The effect of the clown's jest was spoiled. Once again he appeared to have been vanquished. He bowed politely to the stranger, and said:

"We must accept the gentleman's answer. He has extraordinarily good reasons for knowing."

The allusion was so clear, so direct, that the blow went home. Once again the audience was with the clown.

The Cavalier, consumed with impatience, as if he himself had been addressed, did not take his eyes off the face of the gentleman. What would he do? The stranger merely folded his arms with the utmost composure.

Made bold by this apparent and unexpected meekness, the clown threw all restraint to the winds:

"Listen now, my master, to this reasoning. If we agree that the noblest part of the body is . . ."

The strange gentleman, unfolding his arms, decided to move a step forward.

". . . Is what the gentleman has just said it is, it therefore must follow that . . ."

Another step nearer the platform. Violently pushed aside, the crowd was forced to make way.

". . . That the noblest man is . . ."

The third step! The clown, strangely uneasy, began to stutter.

". . . The . . . one . . . who . . . has . . ."

The fourth step! Steadily, with no haste, opening a passage, as the prow of a ship cuts through water, the gentleman continued to advance toward the platform, his eyes still fixed on the buffoon. The clown became less and less sure of himself, and his voice was almost stifled.

". . . Who has the longest . . ."

CHAPTER II

SAVED BY LAUGHING WOMEN

Now the two antagonists were nearly touching.

Animal instinct gave the audience a presentiment of the storm that was coming. The Parisian lounger is without a rival in scenting an approaching brawl. The crowd now awaited some dramatic event. It already enjoyed what was to come, although every face was tense with apprehension.

The strange man leaned his elbow on the floor of the stage, which just reached his chest. The Cavalier, who followed the development of this singular duel with breathless anxiety, heard the gentleman ask in an interested tone of voice:

"The longest . . . what?"

All laughter had stopped. The spectators shared the clown's uneasiness. In this moment of feverish anxiety people stood on tip-toe so as to miss nothing of the amazing scene.

"The longest what?" repeated the gentleman very coolly.

Parisians are by no means a patient people. They do not like to see those disturbed to whom, for good reasons or bad, they have given their sympathy. In spite of his extreme suavity, the strange gentleman's manner was becoming too menacing, and a muffled protest rose from the crowd.

Finding popūlar sympathy with him, the clown took courage, and, regaining his former insolent manner, shouted into the face of the stranger:

"The longest nose!"

He had made one remark too many. Hardly had the words left his mouth before the clown was hurled from the platform into the arms of the spectators.

"Thank heaven, at last!" sighed the Cavalier, who had been amazed at the forbearance of the gentleman.

But trouble was brewing. The sudden blow was followed by a tremendous uproar. The gaping monkey sank his teeth into the flesh of the intruder. With a sudden jerk of the hand, the stranger hūrled the monkey over the parapet of the bridge, and put an end forever to the little animal's mischievous tricks. The Sieur Brioché lifted his arms to heaven, begging for protection against this invasion of his rights. But his prayer was cut short by a powerful kick that sent him flying off the platform.

From the crowd, at first disconcerted by what had taken place, there now arose ominous murmurs and menacing protests, that sounded like the growling of a hound when its bone has been suddenly snatched away. But the stranger, having performed his task, was again quite calm. From the top of the platform he cast a scornful look at those about him. The Cavalier saw the sad smile reappear. Having obtained the satisfaction that his dignity demanded, it was quite evident that the gentleman did not intend to pursue this adventure further. The crowd, however, was not going to allow him to preserve this attitude.

Oaths were hurled at him from every side. He merely shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. Suddenly several bullies made up their minds. A belligerent spirit came over the mob. Were they going to let themselves be laughed at by one man? Zounds! Swords flashed forth from scabbards. As quick as lightning the platform was surrounded by a dozen men, cursing violently, with swords drawn.

At last the gentleman, with a most melancholy shrug of the shoulders, decided to change his attitude. He smiled at his foes in a pitying manner. His long rapier came out slowly from its sheath, and, very deliberately he put himself on guard. The next instant those assailants who had been most anxious to punish the trouble-maker fell over each other in their haste to get away from the platform.

The Cavalier applauded this masterful action. But, alas, he knew little of a Paris mob and its sudden anger. Where there had been one assailant before, there were now two. Every rowdy and bully on the Pont-Neuf, scenting a fight, rushed to the scene. And the newcomers were more infuriated than the others, although they had no idea what the fight was about.

The gentleman seemed able to cope with the entire crowd, although he was obviously alarmed for fear the blows that began to rain upon him should break the blade of his sword. Attacked on every side by these maddened men whose anger was still further aroused by his calmness, he kept perfectly cool. Turning lightly now here, now there, as if he were in a fencing bout, he continued to distribute with great regularity and method a steady stream of blows. His sword flashed with lightning speed, and when, occasionally, he was forced to use the point, he did so with great reluctance.

However, the situation was reaching a crucial stage, as the attackers only became more enraged when they found themselves held at bay. The courageous swordsman was a little pale, and sweat poured down his forehead and cheeks. Yet from his methodical, impassive manner one would have concluded that it was a point of honor with this man to be overcome and hacked to pieces on the spot rather than yield a single inch to this seething rabble. It was useless for him to try to force a passage through the mob in front of him. Was he to remain there a victim, in this mock-heroic combat, of his own brave rashness and of the absurd fury of the people?

Suddenly an opening was made in the crowd. Above the noise of the fight could be heard a youthful voice, trembling with long-suppressed indignation:

"Carry on, Monsieur, I am with you!"

And at the same instant the gentleman saw a young soldier, wearing a doublet with buff collar, leap up beside him. Not a second too soon. The valiant swordsman was able to carry on only by a tremendous exertion of superhuman power. His coat in tatters, his face covered with blood, he panted heavily, nostrils quivering. The young soldier, holding his sword firmly with his powerful arm, made a savage attack which enlarged the circle about them.

"Can you hold on?" he asked quickly.

"Parbleu!" replied the gentleman, suddenly straightening. "Now that we're two we shall be too many for them."

"He must be from the South," thought the young soldier. Then, aloud, he said:

"Now, Monsieur, get ready and we'll charge this rabble."

With impetuous fire he rushed at the crowd, which was still stunned by the arrival of this unexpected support.

"Strike with the flat of your blade."

"Certainly," answered the soldier.

The two swords swept to the right and to the left, leaving many hurt but few bleeding. Their irresistible drive overcame everything in front of them, as they advanced without once stopping. Under their double attack, the human barrier was forced to give way. Their most stubborn adversaries suddenly wavered, and the two found an open space in front of them.

At this moment the patrol appeared, coming from the Place Dauphine. The police, finally attracted by the uproar, had decided to rush in—too late, of course!

"Quick, we must bolt!" panted the young soldier. "There's the Guard!"

"Confound it!" answered the gentleman in a disappointed tone of voice. "Must we leave the field of victory to those rascals?"

His companion seized him firmly by the arm, and led him away.

Encouraged by the presence of the Guard, the crowd had collected again, and, pointing out the fugitives, started at once in pursuit. Still leading his friend by the arm, the young soldier dodged into a side-street.

"In here," he said confidently, "in here we're safe."

There in the shadow of the high wall and underneath the green dome of the trees, they at last had a moment in which to catch their breath. But the cries of their pursuers came nearer, and they started on again. They had not taken ten steps before they were forced to stop.

"*Sangdieu!*" exclaimed the plucky soldier. "We're in for it now. . . . Look, not a chance for escape!"

This "providential" little street had turned out to be a blind-alley! The woeful expression on the Cavalier's face must have been comic, for, in spite of the danger they were now in, his companion could not keep from laughing.

"All the better!" he cried, making the blade of his sword whistle in the air. "We'll have a really interesting fight yet."

The Guards appeared at the entrance to the little street. Our two comrades looked for a good place in which to make their last stand. Neither of them wished to be caught. The Cardinal had issued severe edicts against those who drew sword. If they were caught now red-handed, there could be no doubt about their case. They would be sent to prison, and, after all, it is easier to keep out of prison than to get out! In this emergency, an angle of the wall in which there was a little door—alas, firmly shut!—seemed to them the best place for their defence. With backs to the door and swords in hand, they waited.

The stream of their foes rolled toward them, filling the street with sharp, menacing threats. The two men braced themselves to meet the first shock of contact. Suddenly an immense human wave broke over them, overflowed them, pressed upon them, making any movement impossible. With a powerful thrust, this uncontrollable mass struck them, crushed them.

At last, they were caught!

And then, at the final moment, it seemed to them that under this gigantic pressure the wall, against which their backs rested, gave way.

A dream? or was it real? They felt themselves falling backwards through the wall. Then their eyes which had been blinded by the flashing of twenty swords, suddenly became blank—they saw nothing. At the same time the ominous shouts of the crowd no longer deafened their ears—the noise became muffled, far away, reduced to a confused murmur. Good heavens! Were they about to lose consciousness—to faint? They tried to pull themselves together to avoid such a calamity, when suddenly, to their amazement, they discovered that they were on the other side of the wall.

There could be no doubt about it! They were protected from the fury of their adversaries by a stout oak door with thick panels and strong locks. The little door, against which they had leaned as they prepared to sell their freedom dearly, had quietly opened. Without knowing what was happening, they had fallen through the doorway and the door had slammed shut in the very faces of the men who had been about to capture them.

Was this assistance from heaven? Neither the strange gentleman nor his brave friend was sufficiently fatuous to believe this. Yet who had opened and closed the door?

Soft laughter striking their ears made them turn around. Yes, without doubt, Providence was taking a hand in this affair, and was conducting it in superb fashion! The enchantment was complete. Two lovely fairies had suddenly appeared before them. Two sylphs—in farthingale and velvet dress! And one of them had the soft eyes, blond curls, and lily-like complexion of the girl in the carriage.

Our two friends already held their hats in their hands. They were about to thank their charming rescuers, the soldier, with a single, fervent word; his companion, with a gallantly composed madrigal. But they were given no chance. The two laughing ladies quickly took off their silk scarfs, and, with a pretty gesture, held them in front of the eyes of the men. There was no denying that the adventure was becoming more and more intriguing. Without a word, the lovely ladies passed the scarfs over the eyes of the men, and tied them behind their heads.

The gentlemen, dumbfounded, allowed all this to be done without a question. Thus blindfolded, they looked like those about to play blind-man's-buff—or, rather, on account of their military dress, like soldiers dispatched during a truce to the enemy's camp. They felt their pretty guardian angels take them by the hand and lead them along the scented paths of a large garden. But why this secrecy? What mysterious scene which they could not behold was taking place in this idyllic setting?

Their curiosity, of course, was great. Nevertheless neither of them even thought of lifting the light bandage, which in all loyalty they must respect and keep in place. Yet their ears were on the alert, and they thought that they heard the subdued whispers of people in conversation. Who then were these people, and what weighty secrets were being discussed that such secrecy was necessary?

The walk at an end, their bandages were lifted. They saw that they were in a paved square of sumptuous appearance, off which was a monumental gate. The lovely girls were still laughing softly, and a slight blush came into their cheeks over their absurd adventure. After a low, stately curtsey to their protégés, and a last wave of farewell, the two "sylphs" tripped gaily back.

Our brave friends stood thunder-struck for a moment, looking at each other in vexation. They had not been given time either to catch their breath, or to blurt out the slightest thanks. The touchy gentleman of martial and literary inclination was the first to regain his composure, and he stared with amusement at the extraordinary disorder of their dress. His companion's face had lost its usual rosiness, and was covered with dust and sweat. From his belt hung a twisted blade, and his military hat, to which one forlorn feather grimly clung, was without its brim. And he himself was no better off. His face was covered with numerous little wounds, his coat in shreds, his vast pockets completely empty, and his fine collar of Genoese lace turned inside out. Thus in rags and tatters, covered with sweat, dust, and blood, the two men made an amusing picture. Here they were, in the middle of an imposing square facing the façade of a palatial mansion. They both felt out of place and looked exceedingly discomfited. And so it was that the two heroes of the brawl on the Pont-Neuf left the magnificent Hôtel de Nevers even more abruptly than they had entered it.

CHAPTER III

A PLEDGE OF FRIENDSHIP

As soon as they found themselves outside the Hôtel de Nevers, the two young men stopped to catch their breath. They were still bewildered.

The Cavalier was the first to recover his composure. With the unquenchable gaiety of youth, he burst out laughing. But his companion retained his dignity. Taking off his hat with a noble flourish, he placed his hand on his friend's shoulder and said in a tone of deep emotion:

"Monsieur, you have just saved my life."

The handsome boy shook his head laughingly:

"Why, nonsense! With your courage, you would have got yourself out of that scrape without me! My hot blood forced me into the brawl to give you quite superfluous assistance."

"No, no!" replied the other, "I know what I am saying. By myself I should have been unable to force my way out, and I was in just the mood to be chopped to pieces before giving way a single inch to those vermin. I shall never forget what you have done for me."

"Your hand!" he added, eagerly seizing the young man's hand, and giving it a vigorous shake, "from now on, we shall stick together through life and death."

More touched by this exhibition of friendship than he cared to show, the soldier returned the hand-shake.

"Through life and death, so be it! But in the meantime be kind enough to follow me, as it's not safe for us to remain so near the scene of our exploits."

The advice was timely. They found themselves in a triangular square, the base of which was the mansion from which they had just made such an undignified exit. The apex of the triangle was the melancholy tower of Nesles, from which extended the arm of a gallows; a lantern, hanging from the arm, swung slowly back and forth, giving the unpleasant illusion of a lifeless body. From this place they had a view of a corner of the Pont-Neuf, where excited groups of persons were apparently discussing their amazing disappearance.

"You're right," agreed the long-nosed fighter, "this place is too exposed. Let us look for some spot where we can make each other's acquaintance in a more formal manner."

"And, above all, we must make ourselves somewhat more presentable," sighed the Cavalier, who, now remembering that the hour of his meeting with M. de Guitaut was not far off, cast a sad glance at his torn clothes and bent sword.

They passed through the Porte de Nesles, crossed a muddy ditch, and, leaving on their right a street in course of construction, followed a little path for some distance. This led them to the heart of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

The eagle eye of the tall swordsman picked out a rustic tavern, whose only sign-board was a bundle of hay hanging over the door. Underneath a trellis of vines, a wooden table and stools promised a pleasant, homely hospitality.

"Here's what we want," he said, seating himself on a stool.

"Ah!" returned the Cavalier, hastening to follow his friend's example.

The next minute a pretty servant placed before these distinguished patrons two cups and a large jug of Suresnes wine. The two comrades eagerly drank a large draught. Then, revived by the glow of the wine, their legs stretched out in comfort, they looked at each other. Both felt the same sentiments, and smiled. Better than any words, this cordial smile said: How pleasant it is, after experiencing a common danger, to be with friends, with young, courageous hearts, alone, far from the noise of the city! Indeed, seeing them thus seated opposite each other at table, one would have taken them for old friends.

And the truth is that something more powerful than time had bound them together. On the side of the soldier, it was sympathy for this tall gentleman, so witty, so courageous, who would draw his sword against the whole world in defence of his unfortunate nose. And the gentleman felt a similar sympathy for this unknown soldier, this fearless youth, who, having just risked his life for a stranger, did not appear to attach the slightest importance to such service.

However, they could not remain there forever without speaking. The swordsman decided to break the silence.

"You are a soldier?" he asked.

"A sergeant in a Flanders regiment."

"Look here! Weren't you the person I so stupidly bumped into in the Place Dauphine?"

"Yes! And I failed to ask for an apology from you!"

"Of course, I remember," answered the gentleman with a frank laugh. "Admit that it was an unfortunate incident."

"Then you did notice me after all. You seemed so engrossed in . . ."

"I had just come from my book-seller's, along the gallery of the Palais. I was reading the first pages of an admirable book."

"Ah! What was the title of this book?"

"*A Voyage to the Countries of the Moon.*"

The young soldier felt a tremendous desire to laugh, but, with a great effort, he managed to say in a serious tone of voice:

"I don't know it."

"It's just been published."

"Indeed! and who is the author?"

"Why, I am," answered the gentleman with the most perfect modesty.

"You mean that you are a poet?"

"I am!"

The young man eagerly seized his brimming cup.

"Then, Monsieur, I drink to your health."

And rising from his stool, he proposed a toast:

"To Apollo and the Muses!"

This pretty compliment agreeably surprised the poet.

Not to be outdone, he raised his cup, and answered:

"To Mars and Bellona!"

They drained their goblets.

The Cavalier was the first to speak:

"And so you are both swordsman and poet?"

"Oh, I am also mathematician, physician, philosopher, pupil of Gassendi—and, in spare moments, cadet in the Guards."

On hearing this amazing list, the eyes of the young man opened wide. But his friend paid no attention to his surprise and continued:

"Doubtless, you have just come to Paris?"

"I arrived yesterday evening."

"For a holiday?"

The Cavalier was on the point of answering "No." But he remembered the prudent recommendations of M. de Comminges. So he merely shook his head in a vague manner.

"I'll wager that you have come to Paris to seek your fortune?"

"Yes. I mean . . . perhaps," answered the Cavalier, more and more embarrassed.

This time the poet noticed his friend's reticence:

"Ah, ha," he thought, "this lad is hiding some secret. We must be discreet."

The Cavalier's bearing became quite forced. This dissimulation was not in keeping with his honest nature and his habitual frankness. Yet he had to obey the instructions that had been given him.

"As a matter of fact," he answered, "there is a good deal of truth in what you surmise. We'll leave it at that; I am seeking my fortune."

"Eh, *parbleu!* then you're in my position. We'll seek it together. While you are looking for glory in arms, I'll be satisfied with the peaceful garland of a poet."

This pacific profession of faith forced a smile to the lips of the Cavalier.

"For a peaceful poet," he exclaimed, "it seems to me that you have a devil of a lot of fun with your rapier!"

"Bah! The rapier doesn't amount to anything. I can handle the pen much better."

This time the Cavalier had to take a deep draught from his cup in order to keep a straight face.

"Tell me," asked the literary gentleman, suddenly changing the conversation, "are you a Gascon?"

"A Gascon?" repeated the soldier, amazed by this unexpected question.

"Yes, a Gascon! In other words, do you live along the beautiful banks of the Garonne, or of the laughing Dorogne, her sister? Are you a Bearnais, like noble King Henry; or from Pibrac's city of Toulouse; or a native of Pau, like Cassien—or, in all modesty, do you come from Perigor, as does your humble servant?"

"Good heavens, no!"

"Too bad," answered the poet. And he shook his head sadly.

Vaguely disturbed, the young soldier asked naïvely:

"Does one have to come from there?"

"No, it's not absolutely necessary—but it is a distinct advantage. If you haven't that in your favor, you must be twice as prudent and twice as clever to succeed in this world. However, don't worry too much about it. Even if you aren't a Gascon, at least you are worthy of being one. . . ."

And with an assurance that somewhat disconcerted the Cavalier, he added:

"At any rate, in my company, you'll soon become one. You see, I take it for granted that we won't separate. Such a lucky meeting as ours must not be dismissed lightly. From now on we are friends like Orestes and Pylades!"

A look of sadness appeared on the Cavalier's face. The poet observed it.

"Is there anything wrong?" he asked, disturbed. "Is this proposal not to your liking?"

"Oh, yes, it is—from the bottom of my heart," said the young man.

He was about to continue, but the poet, reassured by his answer, gave him no time. He had re-filled the cups:

"Let us drink to our friendship!"

They drank rather solemnly, as if this gesture sealed between them a definite pledge of friendship. The poet, somewhat revived by the wine, began to speak in an intimate tone:

"And so, here you are in Paris—you and your rapier, alone by yourselves. You don't know a single person in the city?"

The Cavalier, despite the exhilarating warmth in his body, kept his counsel.

"Not a soul," he answered.

"Have you enough money?"

"Just enough," replied the soldier, embarrassed.

The huge man wrinkled his brow.

"Devil take it, boy, we're all right as far as that goes! My dearly beloved father has just let me come into my inheritance, so I'm rich enough for two. But, tell me, don't you have among your acquaintances some beautiful woman?"

The young man blushed to the tips of his ears.

"A beautiful woman—and why?"

"Ah, my friend, Paris is a maze, which makes the labyrinth of Crete pale by comparison. As soon as you get into it, you are likely to be devoured by the Minotaur."

"The Minotaur!" exclaimed the soldier in surprise. "What sort of beast is that?"

"A beast with a hundred eyes, a hundred ears, that sees everything, hears everything, and knows perhaps at this very moment all about our little prank," said the fighter, suddenly lowering his voice. "This animal lies in wait for young men from the time they make their first bow to the world. If their manners displease him, the beast has many a cave in which to hide the unfortunate persons."

"Why, the very devil!" exclaimed the Cavalier, laughing at the sudden fear of his stout-hearted friend. "Of whom are you speaking?"

"The Cardinal," whispered the poet with a shiver.

"What have we to do with him?"

"You never can tell! That fiendish man has a hand in everything. And, just think, perhaps that mysterious assembly we passed through when we were blindfolded was one of his secret gatherings!"

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed the young man, suddenly becoming disturbed. He had no fear for himself, but the thought came to him that, if there were any danger, his lovely "fairy" was exposed to it.

The poet continued in a gayer manner:

"Now you see why I was asking you whether, in this treacherous place, you had some kind friend to help you in an emergency."

Why was it that the Cavalier kept thinking of the beautiful unknown girl, whom he had already seen twice, and why did he feel so alarmed for her?

The Gascon had emptied the rest of the jug, and now his loquacity was doubled. Resting his elbow on the table, he continued, enjoying the astonishment his words produced in his friend:

"Believe me, comrade, we are living under the rule of women. Woman has remodelled Paris after her own beautiful image. The old Queen brought in the refined manners of Italy; the young Queen has introduced the romantic seriousness of amorous Spain. Everything now is contained in the two words, "love" and "wit." Woman reigns throughout the land. Without her we are nothing! Indeed, isn't it through a woman that even that great statesman, the Cardinal, has become the actual Sovereign of France? If long ago Queen Marie had not cast a favorable eye on him, what would he be to-day, in spite of his ambition and of his genius? Nothing—absolutely nothing, merely the poor bishop of the most impoverished diocese in France."

The young man protested.

"It's one thing to create a bishop," he said, "but quite a different matter to create a soldier."

"Oh, dear! Do you think you're still living in the days of good King Henry, when all that was necessary to reach the top was to be a good fighter—to have a powerful arm and a strong sword? Officers are no longer made in camps or on the battlefield."

"Where, then?"

"In the salons of the ladies of fashion, my good fellow!"

The Cavalier burst out laughing. But his Gascon friend continued in an even more serious tone:

"Don't laugh," he said. "You'll soon see for yourself! In these dainty, luxurious salons you will behold our future generals composing madrigals, uttering gallant phrases, and joining in witty repartee."

As this only made the soldier laugh the harder, the poet added:

"Eh! *Sandiou!* I'll wager anything you like that this evening I can show you a Condé, cousin of the King and a rough old fighter, led about like a tamed lion by his sister, the tender 'Hermione,' and learning to roar gently after the best manner of the salons."

For a moment the Cavalier was silenced. Half laughing, half distressed, he sighed:

"Alas! And I only know how to show gallantry with bullets, to compose madrigals with roaring cannon, and to smile—while attacking!"

"Hear, hear!" cried the enraptured Gascon, "that's not a bad little couplet you've composed. You'll soon catch our fashions. I suspect that you won't cut such a poor figure this evening at the Hôtel de Rohan-Guéménée!"

"This evening? Where? I?"

"Of course! Haven't I told you that I'll never leave your side?"

"I don't know a single person there!"

"What's the difference? I will introduce you."

"But . . ."

"There's no 'but' about it!"

"However, oughtn't you even to know my name before introducing me!"

"Oh, the devil take my carelessness," said the poet, suddenly subdued. "You're quite right. Here we've been talking like old friends for an hour, and we know absolutely nothing of each other—not even each other's names!"

A slight shadow of annoyance appeared on the soldier's face.

"See here," continued the poet, "no senseless formalities between us. Having no official sponsors, let us introduce ourselves."

"Agreed!" answered the young man with sudden decision. "I am called the Cavalier Tancrède."

"Tancrède . . . and then what?"

Excited as he was, the soldier's face became pale.

"That is all," he answered simply.

The gentleman, somewhat disconcerted at first, seized the hand of his friend, and clasped it firmly.

"Splendid," he cried, as if enchanted by the very abruptness of the soldier's name. Then, rising, he gave a low bow, and said with great dignity, as if he were announcing Rohan or Montmorency:

"And my name is Savinien de Cyrano-Bergerac."

A short silence followed this double presentation. M. de Bergerac took advantage of it to straighten out his disordered clothes. The Cavalier was thinking. For the first time in his life he felt at this moment a peculiar embarrassment, almost shame. He was ashamed of this commonplace name of his which, for lack of another, he was forced to adopt.

"What must this gentleman think of me?" he said to himself. "Everything is over now. He knows that I am only . . . And yet he offered his friendship to me so sincerely. Alas, I cannot accept it!"

The thought pained him, because he was already strongly attached to this chance companion who had proved himself so brave and so frank.

"However," continued the Cavalier to himself, "my humiliation will not be for long. Tomorrow I shall have the right to hold my head high. Yes, tomorrow! Ah, but today!"

His head sank upon his chest. While he was in this depressed mood, a thought came suddenly to him.

"If I were to let him know my history, then he would not spurn me."

But he dismissed the thought.

"No, no, I cannot do that. For the sake of mere pride I have no right to reveal this secret, which does not belong to me alone."

In the meantime the poet, unaware of the struggle that was taking place in his friend's mind, was busy straightening the blade of his sword.

Having at last come to the decision that he felt in duty bound to make, the Cavalier decided to put an end to this unfortunate situation at once:

"Monsieur," he said in a tone of voice that he tried to make firm, "the time has come for us to part!"

The Gascon raised his head, dumbfounded.

"To part?" he repeated, as if not understanding the words.

"Precisely! You must remember that a mere coincidence threw us together. There is nothing really to bind us. I shall never forget, rest assured, your cordial and generous reception."

His voice choked, and he concluded hastily:

"Farewell, M. de Bergerac."

Rising with a bound, the poet cut off his retreat and, stretching out his powerful arms, cried:

"*Vivadiou!* What nonsense is this? Ha! do you think that after saving the life of de Bergerac you can stand there and say cavalierly, 'Farewell . . . good luck'!"

"But I must!"

"And why, please?"

"Because we can no longer be friends. You are a nobleman. I am a poor soldier."

"What the devil has poverty got to do with it?"

"Without money . . ."

"No money! Bah! You have a marshal's commission in the blade of your sword!"

The Cavalier smiled sadly, in spite of himself.

"Well, I must tell you the worst. I am without a family—without a name!"

"Without a name! Why, the devil you say! You've a perfect one: Tancrède. That's no family name—it's a hero's name!"

"A romantic name, perhaps, but you must admit that it is rather short. I'm sure it would delight your charming friends at the Hôtel de Rohan!"

"Proud lad! I should like to see any one take exception to the name when it suffices for me!"

"No, no, you shall not have to blush for your friend."

"Cavalier! What do you mean?"

"Ah," said the young man, shaking his fair curls sadly, "although you may not think so, your manner toward me is no longer the same."

"And why?"

"Just a minute ago you spoke to me familiarly, and now . . ."

"And now I still do, *sandiou!*"

Cyrano fixed his piercing eyes on his young friend.

"I again offer you my friendship. Are you going to reject it?"

He stretched forth his great hand.

"If you refuse, I shall consider it a personal insult, and that you think me not enough of a gentleman to be your friend. In that case . . ."

He made a quick movement toward the hilt of his rapier:

"In that case, *vivadiou!* even if you have saved my life, you will have insulted me, and I shall demand satisfaction."

The Cavalier suddenly found himself laughing. He could no longer maintain his formal manner when a man's heart was being offered him at the end of a sword.

The poet, without a trace of a smile on his face, his eyes questioning the young man, his hand outstretched, waited. Then suddenly the soldier felt a powerful emotion seize him. His eyes became dim, and he was unable to utter a single word. He did not take the outstretched hand, but, with an instinctive movement, he threw himself toward his comrade. The arms of the stout-hearted poet opened wide to receive him, and they remained for a long time in a close embrace.

"Thank heavens!" exclaimed the poet, laughing gently. "Zounds! I should have been broken-hearted to have had to harm you."

The Cavalier, in his joy, stammered:

"At last . . . Now I can speak! I want to tell you that the friendship which you have so generously offered to a poor soldier of fortune . . ."

"And which you have accepted?"

"Oh, of course! . . . Well, the soldier is not unworthy of it! Yes, a while ago I hesitated to confide my life's secret to a stranger. But now, everything is different. We are bound to one another. I am devoted to you, as you are to me. You have the right to know who I am."

With a sudden gesture, Cyrano stopped him:

"I do not ask you for a word of explanation, Cavalier. You saved my life, you are my friend; that is enough."

"Enough for you, perhaps—but not for me. I feel that between us there should be no misunderstanding, no secrets. Listen to me, and then you can judge whether I am worthy of your friendship."

The poet seized his hand, and, in a tone of tender seriousness, said:

"Speak then, lad, since you really wish to. Cyrano listens to you, and, no matter what you say, not a word will be repeated of what you care to confide to me."

He leaned forward on the table, listening to the soldier.

The Cavalier raised his head. There was now a proud dignity in his manner. After a moment's hesitation, he began:

"I told you that I was a poor soldier, without money, without name. That was true a few days ago. But now it is not. Tomorrow my fortune will have been decided, and I shall assume my rightful position. I shall have ceased to be a wandering soldier of fortune, and will take my proper place in the world.

"Yes, tomorrow, the Cavalier Tancrède will cease to exist. I shall at last assume the name of my father, and of my ancestors."

"The devil!" exclaimed the surprised Gascon. "This is what I call an extraordinary beginning!"

The young soldier continued with an air of frank embarrassment:

"To tell the truth, I cannot say today what this name is."

Cyrano made a discreet gesture:

"If you must be quiet, my friend, it makes not the slightest difference. On with your story."

"No, no, you misunderstand me. The fact is that I myself do not know what it is! Everything about my history is odd. The hour which should decide my future is at hand.

"It surpasses my wildest dreams. I have reason to be sure of that. But in what my fortune consists, I have no idea."

This confession was made so spontaneously that the poet, intensely curious, could not refrain from murmuring:

"How amazing!"

"I must first tell you that I am a man marked out by Fate. I have over my heart a sign that has been indelibly branded on me—a star—*my star!* Well, this sign has not failed me. Through it tomorrow I, a plain soldier, will become an equal of the greatest!"

"*Corbleu!* What a romance!" cried the fascinated Cyrano, rubbing his hands together.

"A romance?" replied Tancrède. "Let us admit that it is a . . ." Very seriously he completed the sentence: "A romance without fiction, a true romance, true as the Bible. Listen . . . I am sixteen years old . . ."

"Sixteen!" exclaimed the poet, glancing at the strong, mature body of the young man. "*Malpeste!* There's promise in that!"

"I was a poor boy, born—nobody knows where. Flanders, perhaps; perhaps somewhere else. Some German soldiers found me when I was young. They were harsh, cruel people—mercenaries, who made their living by fighting, selling their services to the highest bidder. Sometimes they fought for the King, sometimes for the Emperor; today for the Cardinal and the Swedes, tomorrow, against them, for Lorraine or the Spanish.

"They brought me up in a rough manner, amidst the smoke and dust of battlefields. You see, Cyrano, that I became a man before my years, and, while still young, learned a few tricks with the rapier."

The poet silently nodded assent.

"From the time of my birth, I always knew one thing—that I was of noble blood. For that reason I have been accustomed in all my actions to conduct myself like a gentleman."

"God be praised!" interrupted Cyrano. "I noticed that a long time ago."

"And so they always called me 'The Cavalier,' 'The Cavalier of the Star,' and, as a Christian name, they gave me 'Tancrède'."

"The two names please me."

"About my family, and my infancy, I know nothing. I used to be very disturbed about all this. But I had my sign. . . ."

"The star?"

"Yes, the star. The old trooper who acted as my father, mother, and nurse, assured me that he knew the meaning of the sign—that one day he would reveal it to me. Oftentimes when wine loosened his tongue, he would mumble confused sentences: 'Courage, lad, have faith in your star! The time will come when you'll be rich and powerful, and make all the great lords envy you.'

"Then he would laugh, and I could hear him mutter: 'Aye, I'll be rich too, and I know one person who won't be laughing.'

"But never would he say more than this. The others all thought these mere drunken hallucinations. Yet I felt he spoke the truth. He must have known many other things, but before he told them to me he wanted to wait until I was a man. Then, sword in hand, I could claim my rightful position."

The young man paused an instant:

"Certainly there was nothing tender about the old soldier. He was a man of blood and iron. Perhaps he saved my life and brought me up just to make his own fortune through me. But he was all I had during childhood. It was he who made me a man and a soldier!"

"And what a splendid little soldier!" thought the Gascon.

"Suddenly one stupendous event left me alone in the world, and on the way to unravel the secret of my destiny." Cyrano felt himself becoming more and more fascinated.

"Continue," he murmured breathlessly.

CHAPTER IV

THE CAVALIER'S STAR

THE Cavalier obeyed.

"It was during the last war. For the time being we were fighting for the King of France against the Imperialists. The day's fighting had been strenuous, and when evening came the result was still in doubt. Gradually the tumult of battle lessened. Suddenly there was a distant report of a cannon, and a chance ball arrived in our midst, crushing the legs of the old trooper."

The poet was breathing excitedly:

"Continue," he urged again.

"So there he was, stretched out on the edge of a wood. I was on my knees at his side, holding his head. An unforgettable moment! His wild eyes were fixed on me questioningly. I watched his life ebb away, drop by drop. And the horrible thought haunted me that at his death would perish all hope of ever discovering the secret of my life.

"Yet I dared not speak to him, as it would have shown that he was dying. He gasped for breath. Suddenly he noticed his crushed, bleeding legs. He tried to rise up, screaming, swearing, cursing his fate, defying death, blaspheming God!

"I had the feeling that my old companion was about to die and carry my secret, my hopes, my very life with him to the grave."

Deeply impressed, Cyrano cried out:

"A romance! A more stirring romance than *l'Astrée* . . . more beautiful than the finest inventions of Scudéry. Continue, Cavalier, I hang on every word."

"At this tragic moment, as if God had taken mercy on me, a man appeared at the edge of the wood. I recognized him—what soldier there would not? He was a priest. An unusual priest, it is true. He was young and had the courage of a swordsman, the spirit of a nobleman; he could always be found in the thick of battle. They say that at one time he had been a soldier.

"He was walking along, looking for some wounded man to assist, or some dying person to console. Suddenly the old trooper saw him, and changed color. He who had blasphemed and cursed at death like a devil became, in an instant, humble, resigned, and gentle; he was like a sacrificial lamb.

"Then a miracle took place! A word escaped from his lips. His conscience seemed to give him new life. Gently, he asked me to retire. He called to the priest who approached and knelt by his side. Then, slowly, at great length, the wounded man confided to the holy father his last confession.

"What deep repentance he must have been experiencing! I saw him speak in jerks, gasping constantly in his haste to complete the confession. He seemed to speak of me, for the priest kept looking at me. Once, even, he arose, and, following the directions of the dying man, took from the holster of the soldier's saddle what seemed to be a box or a little casket.

"Now the poor soldier spoke only in short phrases. He was racked by the last pains of death. Finally the priest, with raised hand, made the sign of absolution.

"My old protector became even more pale, but a light smile rested on his discolored lips . . . he was at least leaving this world in a Christian manner."

Cyrano breathed heavily.

"And the casket?" he cried, "this casket must have contained the secret of your birth."

The Cavalier shook his head.

"I don't know. It was sealed when I got it. The priest deposited it with me as a sacred trust."

"At least he told you what was inside?"

"No! Another person is to reveal that to me."

"But the trooper's dying words—he repeated them to you?"

"Of course not! He had received them in confession. They must rest with God and him."

"*Pécaïre!*" exclaimed the excited Gascon with irritation. "Then, how do you know . . . ?"

"I have told you. All that I am sure of is that in the casket is my future. It is my one hope, my fortune and my name. The priest's words have remained engraved in my heart."

"Well, what did he say?"

"This: 'The man who just died is already before the supreme Judge. Let us not pass judgment on him; he atoned for his sins at the last minute. No matter what you may learn some day, do not curse him. When tomorrow you achieve high fortune, remember that you owe everything to his final repentance.'"

"Is that all?"

"No, wait. He added: 'I can not say more to you, but soon you will know for yourself and understand. No matter how brilliant your future may be, never forget that all comes from God, who can both give and take away. And now and then pray for the soul of this man whose last act has saved you.'"

"Oh, bravo!" exclaimed Cyrano with exultation. "Noble priest! You should say a few paternosters for him as well as for the trooper."

"And then he gave me a small wooden box of fine workmanship, sealed with a star . . ."

"Your star, *parbleu!*"

"He told me to take this box with me to Paris, and there to give it to a man whose name he gave me. I was to make myself known by saying just two words . . . the name of a city and a date."

"And so that is all?"

"That is all. The recipient of the casket will do the rest. He will entrust this precious box to the proper person."

"A woman," thought Cyrano. "They're always in it!"

Time had passed quickly during the soldier's narrative, and the sun was beginning to set. The clock at Saint-Germain-des-Prés struck four o'clock.

The Cavalier jumped to his feet.

"Four o'clock! I am off to a fine start—almost missing my audience."

With a few pats he tried to straighten out his clothes.

"Where, then, are you going?" asked Cyrano.

"To the Louvre!"

"To the Louvre?" gasped the astonished poet.

"Yes, that's where they are awaiting me."

"*Corbac!* You didn't tell me that . . . why, you're guilty of treason. You, *you* have an audience at the Louvre, and then let *me* offer you *my* protection!"

"Will you go back on your promise?"

"But now it is I who should seek your protection."

"Don't be absurd," answered the young man, amused by his friend's uneasiness. "We are making an equal exchange, my dear fellow. When you thought me poor and friendless, you offered to share your fortune with me. Now, the least I can do is to offer to share mine with you."

But Cyrano, suddenly discreet, hesitated:

"Well, but . . . I don't know whether I ought . . ."

"Ah, ha! So it is you now who seek to withdraw, M. de Bergerac! Well, you wrong me, and it is now my turn to demand satisfaction."

With a sudden flourish, he seized the hilt of his rapier.

"Why, child!" exclaimed the poet, pressing the youth to him in another embrace.

The young man quickly fastened his sword-belt, put on his battered hat, and, with a friendly gesture of farewell, departed.

Cyrano watched him disappear, walking with his light, soldierly step, full of hope and confidence.

"What a noble young fellow!" he thought. "A nobleman of high rank . . . that vexes me. I like him better as a plain soldier."

CHAPTER V.

ONE GOOD TURN DESERVES ANOTHER!

WHILE Cyrano, delighted with his new friend, relieved his emotions by eating a large dinner, the Cavalier walked with quick step toward the Loūvre, where he hoped to make his start upon the road to fortune and glory. In this interval, while our two friends are so busily engaged, it might be profitable to take a rapid glance at the political situation in France at the time.

This apparent digression may help to explain several difficult points, particularly the mysterious gathering at the Hôtel de Nevers, which had so interested and disturbed our two friends.

Armand Duplessis, Cardinal-Duke de Richelieu, ruled France. For seventeen years his strong arm had guided the destinies of his coūntry toward the double goal of the preëminence of France in Europe, and the absolute sovereignty of the King within France. He found two obstacles in his way: the Huguenots within the country, and the House of Austria without. With the aid of the Catholics he crushed the Protestants in France; with the aid of the Protestants in Sweden and Germany he conquered the Holy Roman Empire and His Catholic Majesty.

England hung in the balance, uncertain. Richelieu had won her favor by marrying Louis XIII's sister to Charles I. He had been uneasy about the Duke of Buckingham, the King's favorite. By seizing La Rochelle he took from the handsome duke his most precious possession; and the providential point of a Puritan dagger deprived the Englishman of his other choicest possession—his life.

Why then should one doubt the Cardinal's divine mission? Yet there was a person who did—the Queen-Mother, the old Italian, who in a fit of senile passion had raised Richelieu to power, and who had lived to regret bitterly her action. Her astrologer predicted the death of both the minister and the petulant King. So Marie de Médicis, good mother that she was, began to plan for the future. With the help of the Comte de Chalais, she would marry the King's widow, the easy-going Anne of Austria, to her beloved second son, Gaston. But Richelieu discovered a splendid way to cut short the astrologer's predictions! He beheaded Chalais and banished the old Queen and her son from France.

As for the young Queen, Richelieu kept her in France. He had several reasons for this, the first being that he loved her. The proud, romantic Spanish lady could not reciprocate the love of this cold, unrelenting statesman, whom she both respected and feared. Only once had her heart been won—by the handsome, brilliant Buckingham.

And what, you ask, of the King? The King hunted, rode, and fenced with his favorites, Baradas and Saint-Simon. He disliked the Queen, and avoided her company as much as possible.

At the time that this story begins, Chalais was dead; Marillac was dead; Montmorency was dead—a favorite, a minister, a prince! Châteauneuf, the Keeper of the Seals, was growing old in the dungeon at Angoulême. Of the Queen's two favorites, Mlle. d'Hautefort was at Mons, and Mlle. de La Fayette was in a convent. The Duchess of Chevreuse, friend and confidante of the Queen, continued her romantic career in exile. And the King's mother, the widow of Henry IV, was dying in poverty outside of France, not having seen her son or her kingdom for eleven years.

Richelieu reigned with an iron hand.

The year before he had taken Turin from the Imperial army, and Arras from the Spanish. Everywhere he was successful. Yet never had the great Cardinal felt his position to be more delicate, more precarious; never had he needed to be so much on his guard. The reason for this was the King's restlessness. A dangerous plot was being formed by the dissatisfied, the ambitious, the patriotic; by those who were incensed by the Queen's unhappiness.

The King finally agreed that as soon as peace was made with the enemy, he would rid himself of his prime minister. So serious was his position that the Cardinal ordered one of his generals to allow himself to be defeated in battle. But, alas, such a subterfuge could not be continued indefinitely. He must find some other remedy. There was nothing left for him now but to win the support either of the Queen, or of Monsieur, the King's brother.

At this period the Queen was at the height of her regal beauty. She was generous and kind, though feeble, uncertain, broken by her sad life, and devoid of any real affection. She would be a docile and powerful instrument in the hands of any one who could win her love.

Gaston, commonly known as *Monsieur*, Duke of Orleans and brother of the King, was an entirely different type of person. Although expelled from France along with his mother, he had managed to return through a piece of dastardly treachery. He had joined the Duke of Montmorency, the first nobleman of France, in a rebellion against the King. On the very field of battle he betrayed his noble friend, who straightway was beheaded. But Gaston, greatly enriched by the bribe which had been paid him, re-entered France in official favor. Since then he had continued his disreputable career, always willing to sell his services to the highest bidder. He was the most dishonored nobleman in France.

In spite of the opposition of the King and the Cardinal he married Marguerite de Lorraine, a princess hostile to France. This match was not recognized in France, so Monsieur, separated from his wife, had to content himself in Paris with his mistresses and his worthless group of roughs and desperadoes, popularly called the *Vauriens*. For his best friend and boon companion, Gaston chose a priest by the name of La Rivière—a worthless rascal, son of a tailor, whose real name was Barbier. The Queen never forgave Monsieur for betraying Chalais, and for leaving her without a buffer against the King. Nevertheless, it was the aim of the conspirators to reconcile Anne and Monsieur.

Richelieu realized that this storm was brewing, and kept watch. The beautiful Chémerault, a close friend of the Queen, was in his pay. As for Gaston, he kept an eye on him through La Rivière, whom he controlled both through bribes and by fear. This coward, whom he had intimidated by sending him to the Bastille for a short time, betrayed all his master's secrets to Richelieu, at the same time that he was equally faithless to the Cardinal.

So it was that at the very moment when Cyrano and his friend the Cavalier entered the gardens of the Hôtel de Nevers, unexpectedly, the leading conspirators were holding a council of war. This, of course, explains why our friends were so carefully blindfolded. If they had taken off their bandages, they might have seen assembled the Abbé de Gondi, the Duke de Guise, the Duke de Beaufort, and a young gallant who was called M. le Grand. Finally there was Monsieur himself, accompanied by his inseparable La Rivière and a guard of *Vauriens*. The Queen alone was not present. But Marie-Louise de Gonzague, Duchess of Nevers, could answer for her. The Queen had also sent to the meeting her most trusted and intimate maid of honor to report to her what had passed. What would our Cavalier have thought had he known that this accomplice was Mlle. de Cernay, his lovely fairy and guardian angel!

The meeting at the Hôtel de Nevers had been an animated one, and lasted well on into the afternoon. So it was that when the Cavalier was hastening by the Porte de Nesles toward the Louvre, he was astonished to find himself stopped by a great commotion. The little triangular square which an hour before had been completely deserted was now filled with carriages, sedan chairs, and noble gentlemen.

The Cavalier had retraced the path that he and Cyrano took to reach the little tavern. From the Faubourg Saint Germain to the Louvre, the only direct route was by way of the Pont Neuf. Being somewhat pressed for time as the hour of his audience was not far off, the young man had naturally chosen the quickest way back. It was growing dark, and he ran little risk of being recognized by the guard. Thus at the very moment that the conspirators were leaving the Hôtel de Nevers, the young soldier arrived at the Porte de Nesles.

One would never have suspected that this brilliant assemblage was composed of conspirators. They separated with embraces, curtsies and bows, as if they had passed the afternoon in gay and witty conversation. Or perhaps they had been listening to some dissertation by the learned Duchess of Nevers, or, even, had been holding a brilliant Court of Love in the shady garden. By the light of flambeaux, held by liveried footmen, the various gentlemen assisted the ladies into their carriages and chairs.

The Cavalier paid little attention to this spectacle. Impatient at the delay, he tried to force a passage through the crowd.

"Zounds!" he muttered, "it was much easier to get by here an hour ago."

Soon he was compelled to come to a complete stop to allow a group of gentlemen to pass by. Although they walked on foot, they must have been persons of importance, for every one bowed respectfully before them.

"Confound these jackanapes," thought the impetuous youth, "they will make me miss my audience."

Nevertheless, the Cavalier was forced to follow in the footsteps of this group, which completely filled the street. They, unfortunately, seemed to be in no great hurry, and walked along at a most leisurely pace, laughing and talking.

"Zounds!" exclaimed a large gentleman with a merry face, who seemed to be the leader of the group, "this discussion of politics has almost split my head. It will be for you, M. l'Abbé, to straighten this out."

"Willingly, Monsieur," answered the man who had been addressed as M. l'Abbé, a pitiful little person with a rather comic face. "Well, you see I've already been made a cabinet minister. I lack only the proper hat."

The gentleman laughed loudly:

"Is that all you want? By heavens, you'll have it! You won't be the first scoundrel to become cardinal."

Then, turning to a handsome young officer arrayed in a most rakish Spanish costume, he added:

"The truth is I don't understand all this subtle rigmarole that's going on. I'd let the whole affair go if my sister-in-law hadn't sent me such an enchanting messenger."

"You mean that charming, young innocence with the soft eyes?"

"And who the devil did you think I meant? Ah, the language of those eyes spoke whole volumes! I understood their meaning."

"Then why don't you learn still more of those eyes?" suggested the other.

"Good advice," agreed the priest. "Thus you would reconcile yourself to the Queen in an entirely unexpected manner."

General laughter greeted this sally.

"Come, friends, let us amuse ourselves. It's about time! Ah, here is the Pont Neuf, as deserted and quiet as one could ask."

It must be remembered that the gallant noblemen of this period were accustomed to amuse themselves by stripping tardy townsmen of their coats, attacking the guard, pursuing with whips idlers and beggars, smashing into houses and shops. Monsieur and his *Vauriens* were past-masters at this last game. To the extreme discomfort of the occupants of a house, they would throw all the furniture and wearing-apparel out of the window, and make a glorious bonfire of them in the middle of the street.

Fuming with anger, the Cavalier was forced to follow behind this little group. Only once did their conversation interest him.

"Of what pretty eyes are these rascals talking in such a disgusting way?" he wondered, vaguely disturbed.

Suddenly he checked his pace. As he left the little street in which Monsieur and his followers had been carrying on their bantering conversation, he instinctively looked back. He saw advancing a dark object with two bright lights. Undoubtedly, a carriage with lighted lamps. Once again the fair image of the young girl with soft eyes passed through his mind.

At this moment the clock of the Samaritaine struck the half hour. The time of his audience was almost at hand.

With instinctive precaution, the Cavalier made a careful survey of the neighborhood. There was hardly a person on the bridge. In the dusk the Pont-Neuf was as deserted as it had formerly been animated. The sound of the footsteps of Monsieur and his followers was now distant. At last they entered the Place Dauphine, and not a sound could be heard.

"Bah!" exclaimed the Cavalier to himself, "what a romantic creature I am! No one can speak of pretty eyes without my becoming excited!"

Reassured, he continued his walk, increasing his pace somewhat. But he had not taken twenty steps when a faint rumbling of wheels made his heart beat faster. He recognized the noise as that of a carriage crossing the bridge—*her* carriage. He stopped, waiting, hoping for another glimpse of that lovely face.

She passed by, rapidly, like some heavenly vision in the night. The young man closed his eyes. For a brief time he remained motionless, in ecstasy, keeping pure and intact the picture of the charming stranger. When he opened his eyes, he beheld a strange sight. The carriage stopped in the middle of the bridge. A man held the horses by the bridle, and from a shadowy corner several figures wrapped in dark cloaks jumped out.

All this happened quickly, without noise, as if in a nightmare. After a moment's hesitation, the coachman tried to gain control of the horses, while the footmen, with drawn swords, jumped to the ground, and prepared to resist the attackers. . . . The young man was about to rush forward to the servants' assistance when (unbelievable sight!) he saw them suddenly drop their weapons, and then rush off in a most disorderly flight. All this had happened without the slightest noise!

Completely stunned, the Cavalier said to himself:

"Good heavens! Am I awake?"

It was difficult to believe that this scene was real. Suddenly he saw a man open the door of the carriage, and step inside.

Then there was a cry which pierced the very heart of the Cavalier—a cry, of mingled indignation and surprise, rather than terror.

His unknown protectress was in danger—and she had called out for help. As quick as lightning, he rushed forward.

One of the men, taking the place of the vanished coachman, started to turn the horses around. Alas, for him! the young soldier's attack was so swift that he did not have time to utter a word. His collar was seized in an iron grasp that lifted him off his feet. Half-strangled, then spinning like a top, he crashed to the ground a few feet away.

The other attackers were grouped around the carriage door in a solid body. Gritting his teeth, the Cavalier charged with clenched fists upon them as if hurled from a catapult.

Though surprised, they withstood this attack firmly. By force of mere numbers they formed an almost impenetrable rampart.

Then rage blinded him. Stepping back a pace to gain room, he drew his rapier with a vicious flourish, and again rushed upon the group of black-coated men. In the fight that followed, the infuriated young soldier saw nothing, heard nothing. He struck, struck, struck into the pile of men, now with the point of his rapier, now with the flat, now with the edge, anywhere, everywhere.

"What a madman!"

No other word was spoken. Only clashing of steel, rattling of swords, steady, heavy panting.

There was no withstanding this frenzied onrush. Suddenly the black-coated men divided, driven back in complete rout. Before the Cavalier could understand what had happened, the square was empty. Only thirty seconds had been required to bring about this amazing result.

The head of the soldier appeared at the glass of the carriage door. From within an imperious voice cried out:

"Who's there? Who dares to . . ."

The sentence was never finished. The soldier had roughly opened the door, and, infuriated as he was, he presented a picture that would have taken away the breath of the most stout-hearted man. Cheeks flushed, eyes sparkling, hat battered and sword dripping blood, he looked so ferocious that the arrogant personage inside thought it prudent to beat a hasty retreat through the other door.

Now master of the field, the hero of this encounter found that he held in his arms a young girl whose torn clothes and throbbing heart sufficiently testified to the resistance she had made against her brutal aggressor. Courageous, she did not tremble; her clear eyes shone with confidence. Only a little spot of red colored the white transparency of her cheeks.

"Thank you," she said, quickly.

Deeply moved, the Cavalier could not answer a word, but pressed tenderly the tiny little hand that rested in his.

However, the proud gentleman could not allow himself to be beaten thus ignominiously.

"Holla!" he cried, trying to rally his companions. "Holla! Fontrailles, Noirmoutiers, La Rivière, come back, you dogs!"

Alas! No one showed any desire to obey his command. Somewhat crippled, they advanced slowly, keeping at a respectful distance.

"Well, the devil! Are you going to let yourselves be beaten by this little monkey?"

"Zounds!" answered Noirmoutiers, a handsome officer in Spanish uniform, "I've already got a wound in the shoulder out of this little game. I'm not anxious for more."

"The aforesaid monkey has almost beaten me to death with the flat of his sword," groaned Fontrailles. "If I take another chance I may lose my life—which would be a great pity, as it's all I possess in this world!"

"As for me, Monsieur," squeaked a voice from afar off, "I am a man of wisdom, not of action. It's not the duty of a prudent minister to expose himself in a scuffle!"

Looking about to discover the position of this last speaker, they finally caught sight of the thin figure of La Rivière, perched on the pedestal of the statue of Henry IV.

The crafty priest had stolen away as soon as the fight started, and from this safe observation post had witnessed the brawl.

"Very well!" said the nobleman, shrugging his shoulders in contempt, "I find then that I am alone."

Advancing with assurance toward the two young people, who were still standing hand in hand, he asked arrogantly:

"Well, my fine young man, you seem to be unaware that I am . . ."

"*Pardieu*, I have no particular desire to find out," answered the Cavalier warmly. "You are a man who has just insulted a woman most grossly. I care to know nothing more."

A shudder seemed to pass through the ranks of the dark-coated men. Their chief winced.

Suddenly feeling sorry for this valiant little soldier, from whom he had just received a hard blow, Noirmoutiers whispered in a low voice:

"Be careful!"

"You will pay dearly for those words," threatened the nobleman, as he glared at the Cavalier.

"Bah! If you care to, you may try to bring about this repentance on the spot. Draw your sword, I am ready."

The distant voice of the priest exclaimed sarcastically:

"This is not a dream! Put up your sword, little man, and go away. That's the wisest thing for you!"

Without bothering to turn around, the Cavalier put a quick end to this harangue:

"Mind your own business up there!"

Irritated at this mock-heroic situation, the nobleman spoke in a low voice to his followers.

"Enough!" he said at last, turning to the young man. "Your manners need correction! You will soon discover how we punish such presumption."

The young man felt the little hand that he held quiver. He reassured her with a quick pressure of his fingers.

The great nobleman stepped nearer. He turned up the brim of his hat which had hidden his face, and opened his coat so as to display his magnificent court uniform.

"Do you recognize me?" he demanded.

The Cavalier shook his head:

"No!"

"Well, well, this is amusing! Come, gentlemen, and see the only man in France who doesn't know me."

The young soldier now began to be alarmed, but he refused to give way to this man no matter who he might be. With as much pride in his voice as there was insolence in the nobleman's, he replied:

"I am a soldier, Monsieur, and only know those whom I meet on the field of battle."

This answer seemed to strike home with stunning effect, for the nobleman suddenly stopped laughing, and his face assumed an enraged expression:

"I am the Duke of Orleans!" he exclaimed.

But the young man appeared to lose his head, for he cried out fervently:

"You lie!"

Gaston d'Orleans—for it was he—trembled. Never had a King's brother been in such a humiliating position.

"Yes, you lie! A son of France would never lower himself to attack a woman—here—in front of the statue of his father!"

With a motion of his arm, the Cavalier pointed to the statue of Henry IV.

After this reckless madness, he expected a violent explosion of wrath. Wonder of wonders! There was a general burst of laughter!

Astonished, not believing his ears, he turned around and saw the cause of this sudden hilarity. How could he have known that in thus calling upon the great King Henry he had with his hand pointed to the sniveling La Rivière, who, seated on the King's horse, was grinning and leering at them.

This profanation of the statue of the great warrior-king, that ruler so dear to the heart of every soldier, exasperated the Cavalier. Releasing the hand of the girl, he rushed to the base of the defiled monument, crying:

"Get down, clown! Get down at once or I'll come up after you!"

And in his righteous indignation he tried to reach the poor scoundrel with the point of his sword, and succeeded in pricking his legs, and even his breeches. The priest tumbled off the horse with great alacrity, parrying these blows as best he could, and making a woeful face at each new lunge. He dodged in and out among the horse's legs, trying to escape the sword of this terrible opponent who, from below, kept thrusting at him relentlessly.

The sight was most comical, and its effect was heightened by the imperturbable seriousness with which the young soldier continued his burlesque attack. This scene, started in a tragic, dramatic manner, was ending as a complete farce. Everybody laughed: the wounded, the bruised, even the young girl herself, altogether forgetting her recent peril. But Monsieur surpassed them all in his laughter as he looked at the piteous expression on La Rivière's face.

"Come," he decided, "the lad has something to him. He has amused me! This interlude of his has been positively hilarious, and I forgive him."

Then pointing to the statue of the warrior-king, he continued:

"Thank the great Henry, young man. You rid him of a rascal, and, in return, he has interceded for you."

Having said this, the Duke of Orleans waved farewell to the two young people with an air which lacked neither elegance nor a certain nobility. So, followed by his somewhat battered but still laughing *Vauriens,* he departed.

For a moment the young girl remained motionless. She felt that a miracle must have caused this happy ending to so tragic an affair. She could scarcely believe her eyes. Finally she uttered a great sigh of relief. Clapping her hands with an almost childish glee, she turned on her heel so quickly that the sudden movement sent her thin silk scarf floating gently to the ground. She did not even notice this in her rapturous happiness.

"Oh! Thank you!" she cried, turning to the Cavalier, "thank you! I owe everything to your generous aid and courage!"

"Not at all!" replied the young man, bowing. "You helped me first, mademoiselle. . . . One good turn deserves another."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed the girl. "You, then, are the person who tried to save your friend this afternoon—that man with the tremendous nose! And now again you draw your sword to help an unknown . . ."

"I owe all this to the Pont-Neuf!"

She answered him with great vivacity:

"Then you mustn't cross over it again. It's not worth while!"

"How absurd!" he protested.

Suddenly the bells of the Samaritaine rang out the hour. The youth started, and then murmured in a distressed tone of voice:

"Heavens! I knew it! I've missed my audience!"

"Where were you going?"

"To the Louvre."

"That is where I am going too. Who waits you there?"

"M. de Guitaut!"

"The Captain of the Queen's Guards?"

"The same."

"He is one of my friends. I shall ask him to excuse you. Would you care to escort me there?"

This was asked gently, without any false modesty. A glow of warmth entered Tancrède's heart.

"Oh, gladly," he answered.

"Then let us go on foot. For although we have a carriage here, there are no longer a coachman and lackeys."

Both began to laugh at this singular situation. Seizing the horses by the bridle so as to turn them toward the right bank of the river, the young man suggested:

"Get in, mademoiselle, and I will lead the horses back."

The young girl protested:

"Do you think that I shall allow my champion to take the place of a coachman?"

"And yet, you must not return to the Louvre on foot, mademoiselle—nor should we abandon the carriage to night prowlers."

But the golden-haired girl disagreed. With a gesture of repugnance, she pointed to the interior of the carriage which reminded her of the recent cowardly attack.

"No, I don't wish to return in it, nor do I wish you to mount the coachman's seat . . . unless . . ." she continued, smiling gaily at a sudden idea.

"Unless?"

"Unless we both climb up there! Thus, there will be no humiliation for either of us!"

"What a splendid thought!" cried the soldier, enchanted.

Bravely, in her determined little way, the young girl had already put her foot on the carriage step.

"You have forgotten your scarf!"

The young man had just picked it up, and handed it to her.

"If I give it to you," she said, "will you keep it in remembrance of this meeting?"

Blushing with pleasure, he replied by touching his lips to the delicate fabric. The girl then tied it across his sword-belt.

"Now you carry my colors," she said, gaily.

"Well, am I not your champion?" replied the Cavalier.

And he thought to himself:

"If Cyrano could see me, he would say that I had found my protectress now!"

Then, raising his companion with his strong arms, he lifted her up to the seat, where he took his place beside her. Seizing the reins, he started the horses off at full gallop. In this manner, pressed close to each other, they left the bridge behind them. The mad adventure amused them, and they laughed at every lurch of the carriage.

Ten minutes later the majestic gate of the Louvre opened on a most unusual sight: a luxurious carriage, empty, without coachman or lackeys, driven at a furious pace by a soldier, with a buffalo-skin collar and a silk sash, next to whom sat a charming lady in a splendid court dress.

As the Cavalier had foreseen, the hour of his audience had passed. Yet, in spite of all that was at stake, it must be admitted that Tancrède did not seem to be greatly disturbed. The young soldier had confidence in his star, but even more in the assistance that his young protectress had promised. After all, she had said that she would plead for him before M. de Guitaut. His case was won already!

He parted from her with regret. But as he was about to leave the Louvre, he heard a guard call out to him:

"Holla! friend, aren't you the person who had an audience with the Captain of the Queen's Guards?"

"Yes."

"He was not able to wait, but has left this message for you."

The Cavalier quickly opened the letter, and read:

"M. de Guitaut will expect tomorrow at one o'clock the young man who desires an audience. Above all, he advises that the casket be carefully guarded. This casket should be delivered into his hands at the first possible moment."

"Splendid!" exclaimed the young man. "What is postponed is not lost. I'll come tomorrow with the precious casket."

CHAPTER VI

STOLEN!

As HE had explained to Cyrano, the Cavalier had only arrived in Paris the night before. We have seen that he did not spend an idle first day.

The preceding evening, the stable boys at the *White Horse*—that famous inn on the Rue Dauphine—had seen a young soldier with grey eyes, curly hair, and frank appearance, step off the Artois coach. His fine face seemed to be his chief possession, except for a rapier so long that it reached almost to the ground. He carried a light portmanteau from which he obstinately refused to be separated, even for a moment. We, who know the amazing history of the little box, are not at all surprised that Tancrède was reluctant to allow any stranger to touch the bag which held his precious treasure. The stable boys at the *White Horse* made great fun of this valise which he guarded so carefully. The portmanteau did, in fact, look as if it belonged in a museum. It was nearly falling to pieces, the great iron clasps were rusty, and the leather was torn and tattered.

In spite of the lateness of the hour, the young soldier set out with his shabby luggage to find a lodging for the night.

After wandering a long time through the unknown city and often losing his way in the maze of crooked streets, he at last reached the district of the old schools—grouped around the Montagne Sainte Geneviève. There, opposite the crumbling walls of the Collège de Navarre, he saw with delight a quaint little lodging place. The hostess was standing at the door.

"Here is what I want," thought the traveller.

Lifting his hat, he greeted the good woman. Hardly had he started to speak when she seized him by the arm, and led him into the entrance way. Then, without once stopping to catch her breath, she began a long speech, from which he gathered that he was expected, and that a certain M. Bernard had given notice of his arrival. The woman was so proud that she had been able to recognize him as some one just arrived from the country. And she said that luckily she remembered word for word M. Bernard's last instructions:

"When you see him (he told me) warn him to be careful, and don't forget to add: 'There's an ill wind blowing now.' "

This last phrase was uttered in a confidential tone of voice and accompanied by a significant nod. The young Cavalier was not a person of great patience. At first overwhelmed by this deluge of meaningless words, he finally stamped his foot and cried out:

"What, my good woman, do you mean by all this talk of an 'ill wind' . . . and your M. Bernard?"

"Aren't you the person he was expecting?" she questioned in alarm.

"May I perish if I understand what you're talking about. It's the first time I ever heard of this M. Bernard."

The woman looked disturbed. She was beginning to regret her garrulity.

"Well, then, what do you want?"

"I would have told you sooner if you had let me get in a word. I have just come from the army, and am looking for some place where I may spend the night."

The woman hesitated for a moment, but the honest appearance of the speaker must have reassured her, for she replied pleasantly:

"Oh, you're looking for a room? Well, it just happens that M. Bernard's room has been free since morning."

The young man was rather amused at the loquacious old woman, and said in a half-comic, half-serious tone of voice:

"Tell me, why did M. Bernard leave you?"

"I don't know."

"Was it on account of *the wind?*"

The woman looked at him askance, not quite sure what he meant by this remark.

"Come," he said briskly, "show me to my room, if you please."

As he climbed the stairs behind the old woman, he thought:

"This is not exactly a palace! Pshaw! It's only for the night. Tomorrow I shall be rich!"

An hour later the Cavalier, only half undressed, was sound asleep, his head resting on the portmanteau. He did not dream either of the old landlady or of the strange M. Bernard; the one idea that remained in his head was that fortune awaited him on the morrow.

Tancrède arose at daybreak, and whistling a military march, made a hasty toilet. Then, so as not to lose time, he wrote a letter to M. de Guitaut in which he asked for an audience. He did not fail to make mention of the casket, and to repeat the two passwords: the name of the city and the date which the priest had given him.

He then locked his portmanteau, after making sure that the casket was still in its hiding place at the bottom, underneath a pile of linen. He left for the Louvre about the middle of the morning. We have already seen how he was received by M. de Comminges, and how afterwards, having an afternoon to while away, his "star" led him to the Pont Neuf. He had crossed the bridge twice. The first time he made a friend; the second time he discovered his "fairy" again. But on the other hand he had missed his audience with the Captain of the Queen's Guards. So his real mission remained unfulfilled; he had still to wait another day.

When he left the Louvre, slightly vexed at missing his audience but by no means regretting his adventure, the Cavalier hastened to return to his lodgings without going near the fatal bridge. He had not forgotten that his friend was that evening to introduce him to the brilliant society of the Place Royale. He was anxious to see this gathering, of which his friend had given such an intriguing description.

His soldier's uniform, now somewhat the worse for the day's adventure, was not exactly the correct dress for the occasion. In haste to change into more presentable clothes, he began to walk hurriedly toward his lodgings.

By the time he arrived at the little place on the Montagne Sainte Geneviève, night had fallen. He passed his landlady's room without attracting any attention, and climbed the steep stairway that led to his own room. He then lighted a taper, and started to make a complete toilet, such as was proper when one was to appear before beautiful ladies. At last when his mirror assured him that his face had regained its youthful freshness, he began to put on the change of clothing he thought most presentable. His choice had not been a difficult one, as the only costume he had, except for his soldier's uniform, was one he had just purchased in Arras.

He leaned over his portmanteau, and put the key in the lock. A useless movement, for the lock was turned!

"Zounds!" exclaimed the young man in astonishment. "I thought I locked it."

When he raised the lid, a shudder passed through his body: his clothes, which he had packed with great care, were in the most complete disorder. Disarrayed and thoroughly crumpled, they looked as if some one had been searching through them. The Cavalier stopped to look around. Yes, the room was as he had left it; not a trace of any intrusion; the portmanteau was in the same place as before. Doubtless, he himself caused the disorder when he was assuring himself of the safety of the casket.

The casket! He must make sure of that; it was his only possession of value in the world. It certainly would be there, at the bottom, underneath the linen. Feverishly, he returned to the portmanteau. A sudden sweat broke out upon his brow.

"No, no, I simply didn't look carefully. It can't be true. I'm not well. My nerves have played me false. Come, take another look."

With trembling hands and throbbing heart, he emptied the portmanteau bit by bit, shaking each object. First, his clothes, his purse—which was untouched—, his few pieces of linen. The further he advanced in this inventory, the more anxious and feverish and terrified he became. Finally, he reached the bottom.

Slowly rising, very pale, the Cavalier wiped his brow with the back of his hand. There followed a low groan that seemed to come from the very bottom of his heart. He collapsed in a chair, crushed, overwhelmed.

His casket, his sacred trust, his one hope, his fortune . . .

His casket had disappeared!

For a long time he remained motionless, without a single thought in his head. His staring haggard eyes seemed to be following his beautiful lost dream, as it faded away.

However, even such a cruel blow as this could not crush the spirit of this brave youth. A sudden thought struck him; he jumped to his feet. His first idea was to run to his hostess. Obviously he had been the victim of a theft; she should know whether any stranger had entered the house.

But she was not at home.

"Come, come," he said to himself. "Keep cool!"

Slowly order began to develop in the chaos of his mind, and he reflected:

"Can it be a thief? H'm! a strange thief, that, who disregards clothes—and doesn't take my purse! The only thing he carried off was a worthless, useless casket."

The truth began to dawn on him. This was no common burglary. It must have been perpetrated by some one searching for just one object.

Who, then, could it be? The idea that it might be M. Bernard occurred to him. This strange person had occupied the room before him. Who could this enigmatic man be, who left queer messages, and had disappeared so suddenly the previous day? Perhaps he was some spy, or blackmailer, an accomplice of the old woman, who had taken advantage of his absence to steal . . .

Tancrède shrugged his shoulders.

"What in the world am I thinking of?" he murmured. "Of all possibilities this is the most ridiculous. How could M. Bernard know that I possessed this casket? It's out of the question! The only person I have spoken to is Cyrano. He alone knows my secret.

"And, also, what interest could any thief—M. Bernard or any one else—have in these papers? I am the only person who can gain by them."

Yet, despite everything, the evidence was there. The truth was plain, irrefutable, brutal! From the opened trunk, so thoroughly ransacked, *nothing* had been taken except the casket!

"Zounds!" exclaimed the Cavalier, "this is too deep for me!"

Mechanically he püt his hands in his pocket, and felt there a sheet of paper: M. de Guitaut's letter. He re-read it, and certain words assumed a new significance.

"Come quickly, *with the casket* . . . it should be delivered without delay."

His audience with the Captain of the Queen's Guards was for the next day! How, in the meantime, was he to regain his casket? What chance was there of ever finding this mysterious thief, who had departed without leaving the slightest trace? And yet, without the casket, what sort of figure would he cut at the Louvre? He might tell his amazing story, but to what purpose if he did not have the one tangible proof—the old trooper's casket? And if he recounted its sudden, strange disappearance, its theft, who would believe him? He would be taken for an impostor, for some wretched schemer who was trying to win a fortune by trickery.

The thought that he might be considered a liar and an impostor overwhelmed the youth:

"No!" he decided. "I'll not go to the Louvre tomorrow! I'll not see M. de Guitaut—not until I can look him straight in the face and show him the proof."

With this courageous determination, he felt new confidence. There was now a goal for which he might work! He would track down this thief, and when he had found him he would thrust the point of his sword through the scoundrel's throat. But it was now necessary, he realized, to preserve the greatest secrecy about the whole affair. If his loss were generally known, his search would be doubly difficult. If his hostess were an accomplice of the thief, she would be on her guard and say nothing. He must pretend not to have noticed anything, and thus gain time for his own search.

"Yes, now we're talking sense," he muttered to himself. "That's the best plan!"

Congratulating himself on not having disturbed the old woman, Tancrède returned to his room. He now felt very calm, as completely master of himself as if he were about to engage in a decisive battle.

He noticed that all his clothes were laid out on the bed. Of course! He was about to get dressed when this terrible blow had fallen upon him. He was to meet Cyrano at the famous Hôtel de Rohan.

"I must not change my plans," he reflected. "I ought to go there and profit by the kindness of my new friend. And, who knows, perhaps M. de Bergerac will be able to see through all this more clearly than I can. He is the man to help me—he has promised; he will keep his promise.

"How stupid I was to get hysterical at the first obstacle I met on my road to fortune. I'll probably have to face worse difficulties. With Cyrano to help me, it will have to be the devil himself who keeps us from unravelling the mystery."

Oh, the boundless optimism of youth! The Cavalier's heart was already bursting with confidence. And, with this confidence, came the courage that leads one to battle, and the strength that triumphs.

"*Pardieu!* Nothing is lost! In fact, I'm richer than I was yesterday. I've won a friend, perhaps two," he added, kissing the silk scarf he had gained that afternoon.

He dressed with great speed, and, after a moment's hesitation, tied the scarf about him. He was radiant with the glow of young manhood. Taking a last look in the mirror, he fastened on his belt, and left. It was a long distance from the Montagne Sainte Geneviève to the lower end of the Rue Saint Antoine. The road was dark and ominous at this time of night. The Cavalier walked along quickly. When he reached the island of Notre Dame, he crossed over the Pont Marie and arrived at the Rue Saint Antoine.

When at last he entered the Place Royale, he stopped short, overwhelmed. Coming from a dark, quiet street, he had suddenly entered fairyland. He now had a view of that supreme elegance which made Paris at this time the Capital of the World. The sumptuous mansions which surrounded the square gave out from all their windows a dazzling radiance.

The fantastic lights of the flambeaux and torches held in the hands of lackeys created a blazing halo which set off the noble symmetry of the façades of the houses, played on the rich foliage of the trees, became reflected in the glass of the carriages and on the lacquered panels of the sedan-chairs, lighted up the dainty faces of the women. Perfume floated in the air. The soft medley of a thousand harmonious sounds caressed the ear.

Bewildered by the beauty of the scene, the Cavalier felt his confidence vanish. For the first time, without preparation, he, a rough soldier, was to be exposed to the critical glances of elegant ladies and distinguished noblemen. Oh, how welcome if he now had nothing to face but the gunfire of the Imperialists!

He was completely dismayed. Alas, for the first time in his life the young soldier knew fear. But then he remembered the motto which he had adopted: "Carry on to the finish!" These words, which he had repeated in the reek and smoke of battle, with grenades exploding on every hand, while he awaited the coming attack—these magic words restored his courage.

Passing through the endless stream of carriages which emptied their passengers at the magnificent portal, he entered the famous mansion. He climbed the stairs, passed through the antechambers, ignored the numerous lackeys, and suddenly found himself in the salons of the Hôtel de Rohan. Here the noise and tumult stopped. All the bustle was on the outside; within the sumptuously decorated rooms gallant noblemen and beautiful ladies talked in low voices.

Seized again with terror, the young man passed from group to group, more overwhelmed by this religious silence than by the confused tumult he had just left. He felt that his audacity was immense. He looked on every side for his friend, M. de Bergerac, who was to be his sponsor, or rather, his guide and pilot.

As he was leaving the second room, he noticed a young nobleman, in reddish doublet, beautifully cut and ornamented with ribbons. This lively person passed from one group to another, exchanging a compliment here, making a joke there. Walking gracefully by the rows of high arm-chairs, he spoke to the men and smiled at the women with the greatest elegance of manner.

The Cavalier stopped in amazement. This nobleman he suddenly discovered was . . . Cyrano! And what a different Cyrano! There was now nothing of the awkward poet of the Pont Neuf. It seemed as if in changing his clothes he had changed his whole bearing, and even his character. No longer was he the fighter, or the pedant, but a most distinguished gentleman. Yet, complete as was the change, there was one thing which was still recognizable, his nose. It was because of it that the young man finally discovered his friend's presence. When he saw Cyrano thus animated, eyes shining, a smile on his lips, he found to his surprise and pleasure that his friend was handsome.

At the sight of his young protégé, the poet beamed with pleasure. He rushed toward him with open arms and greeted him warmly. The Cavalier wished to tell him at once about the recent catastrophe, but the Gascon, anxious to introduce his friend and to guide him through this new world, refused to listen to a word.

A new world, in truth! A strange and disconcerting one. The honest young soldier felt as if he were in a foreign land. He was bewildered by the manners, by the tones of voice, by the scraps of conversation that reached his ears. The new, affected manner of speaking which had been first introduced at the Hôtel de Rambouillet sounded to him like some unknown gibberish.

While passing through the salons under the escort of the lively M. de Bergerac, the Cavalier noticed several groups of persons deeply engaged in conversation.

There, in a deep recess, they were discussing politics:

"What will the King think about it?"

"The King is tired of being merely 'the first of his subjects.' Moreover, he only sees M. le Grand, the new favorite."

"And M. le Grand sees only the Duchess of Nevers!"

"Can one trust Monsieur?"

"It's the same old story! Monsieur will promise and refuse; Monsieur will advance and retreat. When all is over, he will make us a bow."

"You are pitiless, M. de Gondi."

"Well, at least the Queen is with us."

"Oh, the Queen is completely occupied by her religious devotions at the Carmelite Convent!"

"Where she repents the sins that she is about to commit!"

Cyrano led his friend on, whispering to him:

"The Abbé de Gondi is having his fun!"

The young man, while letting himself be directed here and there, reflected on a strange coincidence. In this group of politicians he thought he recognized several of the noblemen who were collected in front of the Hôtel de Nevers.

Farther on, in front of a large fireplace, the subject of literature was being discussed. A circle of distinguished persons was grouped around a quiet, smiling gentleman, with his back to the fire, who monopolized the conversation.

"M. de Voiture is making prophecies!" explained Cyrano as they passed by.

They next saw a group of women gathered around a low stool, on which was seated a thin, dark woman, piquantly ugly, who was reading something which aroused the approval of her audience.

Again the poet passed on, murmuring:

"That lady—Mlle. de Scudéry—is giving her lesson in amorous geography. She is explaining to those lovely ladies her map of the Kingdom of Love."

They finally reached the centre of the brilliant assembly, where was collected a dazzling group of beautiful ladies in shimmering dresses.

CHAPTER VII

THE CAVALIER'S CHRISTENING

"Here we are," whispered Cyrano. "Cavalier, you must make your bow to our hostesses, the Mesdames de Rohan."

Without leaving the young man time to collect himself, he seized him by the hand, and advanced:

"Mesdames," he said, with a deep bow, "this is my friend, the Cavalier Tancrède, of whom I spoke to you. He desires to have the honor of paying his respects to you."

All eyes turned on the newcomer. Blushing deeply and much embarrassed at being under such a cross-fire of glances, the Cavalier bowed.

The ladies examined him closely, and then leaned toward one another to exchange opinions behind the screen of their fans.

The dowager Duchess considered herself an expert on men's looks. She was the first to speak:

"He has a fine face, this soldier of fortune."

"A soldier of fortune!" sighed her romantic daughter, Marguerite de Rohan. "It is more likely that he is a great nobleman in disguise."

In her lazy, affected manner, the lovely Madame de Guéménée asked:

"Is not this the young hero whose history you were telling us, M. de Bergerac?"

"The same, princess. He is the man who defeated the combined opposition of the entire Pont Neuf. It is to him that I owe my life and the inestimable pleasure of now being able to admire you."

The beautiful fair-haired lady turned her soft eyes toward the brave youth.

"And what do you think of it, M. l'Abbé?" she said, turning toward a little man, handsome in spite of his very dark skin and ungainly legs.

The Abbé de Gondi, with a near-sighted stare, looked at the youth. The glance passed over the Cavalier and rested on Cyrano.

"My dear fellow!" he said smugly to the poet, "your story of the Pont Neuf is good indeed, but I have just heard one that will make you lower your colors!"

In this little world, of which he was the god, the Abbé did not like to be surpassed either in wit or in looks. Thus, the great attention paid Cyrano and his protégé by the ladies annoyed him as much as if he had been the victim of a theft.

"Oh, come!" answered the poet with an incredulous smile.

"You may judge for yourselves, ladies. Here is the story as it was told me by Noirmoutiers, who was there at the time. It took place on this same Pont Neuf, where you, my dear Bergerac, were able to stir up so much trouble. The story is about Monsieur and his *Vauriens*."

And the witty priest with his unequalled vivacity began to tell how Monsieur had assaulted the carriage of a pretty girl, but had jumped out more quickly than he got in—with the point of a sword in his stomach. He gave an amusing account of the dispute that followed, and of the brawl in which Noirmoutiers had been wounded in the shoulder.

Conversation ceased, and a new group was formed about the speaker. The admirers of M. de Voiture and Mlle. de Scudéry, as well as the "politicians," crowded about the lively Abbé. His triumph was complete. Cyrano, tremendously irritated, listened.

"Noirmoutiers is still laughing," continued Gondi. "He says he'd suffer another wound to have an equally amusing glimpse of Monsieur and La Rivière.

"Would you believe it, that rascal La Rivière ran away from the fight, and hid on the saddle of the bronze horse. Well, this young fire-eater, who had held in check the assembled *Vauriens*, became infuriated at such a profanation, and rushed at the crazy Abbé to punish him for his presumption. Using his trusty blade like a pin, he kept pricking the simpleton, who screamed in terror for help."

The merry laughs of the ladies heightened the effect of this amusing picture.

"And as for Monsieur," continued Gondi, "he had his share of misfortune too. This amazing tiger of a lad showed himself as witty as he was brave. He uttered one of those remarks which only a real genius could have made on such an occasion."

A ripple of excitement passed over the fascinated listeners. Not only did they dislike Monsieur, but they loved cleverness above everything, particularly when it was joined with bravery. The Abbé continued his story:

"When Monsieur expressed his supreme amazement that there should be any one in France who did not know him—the King's brother!—this unknown person immediately hurled at the Duke this reply: 'There is no reason why that should surprise you; I am a soldier and only know those whom I meet on the field of battle!'"

This time the Abbé had an overwhelming success. Every one applauded such a crushing retort.

"Oh, impossible!" said Cyrano incredulously.

But his voice was not heard amid the general storm of applause.

"Nothing could be more gallant," said Scudéry.

"Clever, simple, logical," observed Voiture.

The Abbé, after his success, rubbed his hands contentedly. He had accomplished his aim and had turned the attention of the ladies from the young Cavalier—particularly that of the beautiful Guéménée, which Cyrano's friend was monopolizing. The poet was now deeply mortified and vexed that the bravery of his friend had had to take second place. His smile was not pleasant to behold.

"Tell us, M. l'Abbé," asked a frivolous young lady, "who this girl was . . . you know, the young person whom Monsieur . . ."

A sudden murmur of whispering arose as people awaited the scandalous information. The Cavalier became pale, but his color soon returned when Gondi answered:

"Noirmoutiers was discreet and did not give me her name."

"Oh, what difference does it make?" exclaimed the fair princess. "For my part, it's the man that I should like to know."

There were many shocked exclamations behind the fans. This Guéménée! Only she would dare make such a remark. . . . Never had people been more amused.

The Abbé bit his lips in vexation. This remark of the charming princess touched him to the quick.

"Really," he protested, "on my honor, I don't know anything more about it. But, wait, here is Noirmoutiers. He can give us the details."

Indeed, Monsieur's companion, his arm in a sling, was advancing toward them. There was another and more singular coincidence. At that very moment three ladies, escorted by a group of distinguished gentlemen, also entered.

The Cavalier trembled with excitement. Among the new arrivals he recognized the young lady of the carriage, his protectress at the Hôtel de Nevers.

There was a great stir after the entry of these persons, and Tancrède listened intently to the names that were now on all lips:

"Mesdames de Nevers, M. de Cinq-mars . . ."

"And also Mlle. de Cernay."

The hostesses arose to greet with great ceremony the newcomers. When the confusion attendant upon the various introductions had subsided, the Duchess of Rohan re-opened the conversation.

"Really, my friends," she said, "you have just missed an incomparable story with which M. l'Abbé was entertaining us."

"Ah! Ah! The Abbé was telling of his conquests and triumphs?"

"No! An amorous misadventure of poor Monsieur!"

The Cavalier, who did not take his eyes from his unknown friend, saw her first turn pale and then blush. At the same time Cyrano, without at all understanding why, felt his friend's hand tremble on his arm.

"And who is the unfortunate woman whom Monsieur insulted with his attentions?" asked the young Cinq-Mars insolently.

"That is what Noirmoutiers was going to tell us. . . ."

All eyes turned inquisitively on the *Vaurien*. With an instinctive movement, the Cavalier advanced a step ready to protect his lovely friend. The young girl now saw her champion for the first time. She gave him a long, anxious look, full of supplication.

Noirmoutiers surveyed slowly the excited group, not failing to notice the nervousness of the Cavalier and of the girl.

"Mesdames," he began gaily, "I should love to satisfy this legitimate curiosity, but I notice that there is present a person who is in a much better position than I to speak."

"Who?" asked twenty voices.

"*Pardieu!* the one who snatched the unknown lady away from us. Admit that he is the logical person to give the information."

The young girl breathed a sigh of relief.

There was a long, expectant silence. Every one looked about and exchanged puzzled glances. Then Noirmoutiers advanced toward his former adversary, a smile on his lips, his hand outstretched. Those behind crowded in better to view the scene.

The Cavalier, blushing like a young boy, seized the proffered hand. He was overjoyed now that his lovely friend was safe again, and he thanked the gentleman for his noble tact by a firm pressure of the hand.

Here indeed was a dramatic scene. Those within the circle were jostled and shoved about in the excitement. So this was the young man who had held at bay some of the best swordsmen in France, and had even affronted Monsieur himself! And here he was in the most select salon in Paris, instead of languishing in a cell in the Bastille!

As for Cyrano, words cannot describe the hysterical joy he displayed.

"You, it was you!" he shouted, shaking his friend.

"Oh, they've exaggerated everything."

"*Verdioux!* It's you who are exaggerating now."

Then turning to the future Cardinal de Retz:

"It was he, my dear M. de Gondi. It was he, and he never even mentioned it! Well, now, how do you like the ending of your story?"

The Abbé looked long and carefully at the young soldier:

"There is a boy who will go a long way," he murmured, turning his back on the poet.

The rooms were now filled with a pleasant, excited chatter. The forced conversation had given way to general liveliness. The different groups broke up, and people walked from room to room, or remained standing in animated conversation.

The Cavalier was the centre of attention. Cyrano, smiling broadly, led him here and there, introducing him to every one: "The Cavalier Tancrède! . . . My saviour! . . . Monsieur's adversary! . . . The champion of King Henry! . . . The protector of fair virtue! . . . My friend! . . ."

At this period in France's history birth did not eclipse talent. A clever wit or a keen swordsman did not need to be a man of fortune. Consequently, all joined in honoring the young hero, who combined both these gifts.

Nevertheless, Tancrède took care not to lose sight of the lovely vision whom fate seemed always to throw in his way. He now knew that her name was Claire de Cernay, and that she was an attendant of the Queen. He had heard some lady ask her for news of her royal protectress. The answer had been that she had left the austere Convent of the Carmelites a few hours previously to see her friend, Anne de Gonzagüe-Nevers. But from certain whispered words he gathered that this return was merely a pretext. Truly, the young girl was involved in a mesh of mysterious intrigues.

In a quiet corner a consultation was being held. In it were engaged M. le Grand—as M. de Cinq-Mars, Master of the Horse and favorite of the King, was popularly known—Gondi, Noirmoutiers, and other less important personages.

The young man felt vaguely worried about the beautiful girl whose scarf he wore, and wanted to assure her of the support of his sword. But discretion made it necessary for him to keep at a distance. He exchanged several glances with her, and sensed a certain bond of sympathy and loyalty between them.

For one moment, however, they happened to be near each other:

"Thank you, again," she said in a whisper.

"You see, I'm still wearing your colors!"

A question was on the edge of his tongue; hastily he added:

"Am I wrong? I feel that you are in danger."

"Why do you think so?" she asked quickly.

"I don't know! I have a presentiment. If you need a loyal and true sword, mine is at your service."

"That may be a valuable offer."

"If you want me, I am housed opposite the Collège de Navarre."

"What, the house of Barbette?" she asked, astonished.

He was about to ask her how she knew the name of his hostess, but suddenly noticed that they were being watched. He felt it discreet to take leave of her at once.

Some one had just remarked that the young man had no name. The speaker was Mlle. de Scudéry:

"After all, can one properly call him the Cavalier Tancrède?"

One must remember that the novels of this clever, homely woman had set the vogue for historical and mythological names. One had not attained real glory until he had been given some strange, astonishing title, which at that time represented the height of elegance. Paris was now called *Athens;* the island of Notre-Dame was changed to *Delos* —and so on. The leaders of this group which was trying to purify the French language were: *Cléomene* (Mme. de Rambouillet), *Arthénice* (her daughter, the incomparable Julie d'Angennes), and *Orante* (Anne de Gonzague).

Thus it was necessary for the young Cavalier to be christened according to the fashion of the day. Instead of his common name, he must be given some appropriate martial title.

It was a most important matter!

M. de Voltaire (*Valère,* in this other language) suggested learnedly:

"Adamastor!"

Mlle. de Scudéry (known to initiates as *Saraïdès*) offered:

"Polydamas!"

But the beautiful Guénémée held up her hands in horror. She did not believe in this affected manner of speech, nor in the idealized Platonic love of her friends. She preferred a more honest attitude, as opposed to the insipid preciosity of the others.

"Nonsense!" she declared. "Those are names of shepherds. They can only serve for your amorous games. For our brave young friend who performs service of real value for ladies, we must have a more appropriate name—something manly."

The lively Duchess of Rohan agreed with her:

"Martial, vigorous, epic!"

"Tender, also," sighed the sentimental Marguerite.

"Chivalrous . . ."

"Dignified . . ."

"Brave . . ."

"And honest," said Guénémée.

"A name which is fitting for a disguised prince; a name which is both gallant and mysterious," suggested the romantic Rohan.

"Mysterious, that's it!" cried Cyrano.

"What do you think, darling?" asked the Duchess.

Mlle. de Cernay, who had just been called by her pet name of "darling," blushed slightly. However, she felt that she must not remain in the background any longer. She looked at the young man tenderly, and then said with out embarrassment:

"M. de Bergerac is right. His friend has shown great bravery and rare modesty. The only name which will fit him is one which leaves everything in suspense. *Mysterious* is the one word."

"That's it!" cried Cyrano again. "Mysterious. *The Mysterious Cavalier!*"

There was general applause:

"Yes, everything is included in that name—and nothing is decided!" said the beautiful Guénémée with a rather malicious twinkle in her eye.

"M. de Cyrano will be godfather, then, and Mlle. de Cernay godmother!"

"And M. l'Abbé will conduct the ceremony," laughed Cyrano mockingly, as he turned toward Gondi.

So, under the doubly precious sponsorship of his noble friend Cyrano and his charming protectress, Claire de Cernay, the young soldier gave up the name of Tancrède in favor of "The Mysterious Cavalier"!

"The *Wretched Cavalier* would be more appropriate," thought the young soldier, suddenly remembering his impoverished and desolate condition.

In the intoxication of his triumph he had forgotten the recent tragedy. But now, left to himself for a moment, he took this opportunity to draw Cyrano aside.

"I must speak to you at once," he said quietly. "It is most important."

The serious tone of his request struck the poet.

"Why, what's wrong?" he asked, greatly disturbed.

The young man pointed to the crowd of persons around them.

"You're right," observed the poet. "Come, we'll leave."

With a look full of tenderness, the Cavalier bade farewell to his lovely godmother. Then, rapidly, the two friends took leave of their hostesses, and retired from the salon. As soon as they had reached the square, in the quiet of the deserted garden and hidden by the darkness, the Gascon asked:

"Well, *pardieu!* What has happened?"

Separated from that enchanting fairyland, and once again faced with his misfortune, Tancrède cried despairingly:

"My friend, I am ruined!"

"What!"

"My casket has been stolen!"

"The very devil!" said Cyrano.

His brow contracted, and he seemed to be shaken by a powerful emotion. Some one had dared to attack his friend! 'Sdeath! His mind was already made up.

"So, they've stolen your box," he muttered vindictively, taking his friend by the hand. "Well, by the honor of Cyrano, I swear to God that . . ."

He was about to explode in a series of imprecations and threats. But a sudden reflection calmed him, and he concluded quietly:

"There's nothing for us to do but find it! Come!"

We must now leave the Mysterious Cavalier and his friend, and cross over to the other side of Paris, to the narrow Rue de Vaugirard. In so doing we have not separated ourselves as far from our two comrades and their friends of the evening as we may think.

This district, which contained several monasteries and the palaces of the great noblemen, was completely asleep at this hour of the night. All was silence and solitude.

However, there was one small Italian building on the border of the Luxembourg gardens which gave a false impression of sleep. Although the front of the house was plunged in darkness, the light of many tapers shone through the windows that looked on the gardens. And at intervals a little side-door opened to admit different persons who arrived noiselessly, one by one.

A late passer-by who saw them would judge them, from their appearance, to be good townsmen or merchants, or, possibly, devout friars in brown frocks and dusty sandals. How often are appearances deceiving! If this same passer-by could have taken a peep into the room in which these people were assembling, he would have seen with astonishment that they formed a suspicious sort of family group.

On the first floor of this mansion—which is none other than the Hôtel d'Aiguillon—there is a small room, very scantily furnished. In it an old man sits at a desk covered with papers. His thin body, enveloped in a greatcoat, is almost hidden in a large arm-chair. The pale flame of a candle strikes his bowed head. All that can be seen is a broad brow, and a head covered by an ecclesiastical skull-cap, from which protrude several greyish locks of hair.

The solitary worker raises his head, and we can now distinguish the careworn face of an old man. An old man? If we look more carefully, we find that this person can hardly be more than fifty years old. The sad, hard expression of his face at first gives him the appearance of a much older man. It is a heavy face, from the stern eyes to the imperious mouth which appears incapable of smiling.

He rings. There enters at once a person who stands in front of the worker in a respectful attitude. This man can scarcely be more than thirty years of age, and yet his severe bearing would make him appear as old as his master.

Indeed, they greatly resemble each other. The same sombre face, the same serious manner, the same cold eyes. A mere coincidence, however, as one of the men is His Eminence the Cardinal-Duke de Richelieu—master of the King and of the French nation. The other man is Councillor-Secretary of State, Léon Bouthilier de Chavigny.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MINISTER IN RED

"WELL!" exclaimed the Cardinal impatiently, "is the message deciphered?"

"Not yet, Monseigneur. Despatches have arrived from England. They are finishing the transcription."

"Yes, I know. King Charles is sending us an ambassador . . ."

"To demand the return into France of the Queen-Mother."

The imperious voice of the Cardinal was raised:

"The opinion of the Chancellor and of the entire Council is opposed to this return, so dangerous to the peace of the State. Such is the unanimous decision."

"Except for the voice of M. le Grand."

Without noticing this murmured correction, Richelieu continued:

"From Lorraine, what news?"

"Duke Charles has returned to his state. His subjects received him with the cry: 'Hail Monseigneur the Duke, the man with two wives!'"[1]

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[1] Charles IV of Lorraine had left his wife in Paris, while he was endeavoring to have their marriage annulled. Without wait-

The Cardinal could not repress a pale smile.

"Very well done. . . . And what next?"

"The Duke secretly protests against the treaty you made him sign. He thinks his sister should be received at Court as the wife of Monsieur."

"Monsieur seems to be enjoying life as a widower. Moreover, the Council gave a unanimous decision on this matter."

"Except for the dissenting vote of M. le Grand." Once again the statesman pretended not to hear.

"And Sedan?"

"Nothing new, Monseigneur. The Count of Soissons still refuses to return unless Your Eminence entrusts to him the army of Alsace."

"The Duke de Bouillon has been told to depose him from his position."

"He has paid no attention to these orders."

"If he remains obstinate, the Council has decided to convict him of high-treason—unanimously!"

"With the exception of M. le Grand," Chavigny again insinuated.

This time the Cardinal raised his head.

"I know!" he said testily. "The enemies of the State have no better friend than M. le Grand."

A slight trembling shook his voice, but he kept himself in control, and calmly asked:

"By the way, is there any news from Chantilly?"

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ing the result of his suit, he had married his real love, the Princess Béatrix de Cantecroix. This accounts for the coarse salutation with which his faithful subjects had greeted their ruler.

"Not yet, Monseigneur."

Richelieu arose. With a restless step, he walked up and down the room in profound meditation. He paid little attention to the rest of the report of the Secretary. Suddenly stopping in front of the large fire-place, he turned around and said:

"See here, Chavigny, we're by no means through with our adversaries. If our plans are meeting with set-backs everywhere, it is because there is some one near the King who dares to plead for our enemies. It is Cinq-Mars' royal favor which encourages all their hopes and audacious plans."

He stopped a moment, and then said in a bitter tone:

"They have even dared to talk in Her Majesty's presence of ridding themselves of me!"

Chavigny began to protest:

"Of you, Monseigneur! This is a strange time to think of doing that. Have you not just covered King Louis XIII with glory?"

"Oh, the gratitude of the great!"

"At any rate, M. le Grand is your servant, and I much doubt if he has the audacity to bite the hand that fed him."

In a discouraged tone of voice in which there was a shade of scorn, the Cardinal muttered:

"Oh, the gratitude of the mean! In all truth, Chavigny, I feel day by day that that man is slipping away from me. And yet, this little Cinq-Mars, the son of my faithful Effiat . . ."

"He is ambitious!" interrupted Chavigny.

"Ambitious!" exclaimed the other. "Do you think he is capable of that? No, he's in love. The poor fool can see only through the eyes of others; he can desire only that which somebody whispers into his ear. It is his Duchess, Marie, the learned and insidious Nevers, who thinks and plans for him. It is she who has inflicted upon us the disgrace of having this man sit beside us in the Council!"

This bitter thought brought Richelieu's anger to a climax. He said sarcastically:

"And so, now, toward the end of my career, I have the pleasure of seeing this little upstart Cinq-Mars giving his opinions on affairs of state! Where does he get knowledge of such things, the scoundrel? In the kitchens and stables where I discovered him with his grooms and chamber-maids—or in the side-streets of the Place Royale! It is women who have ruined him!"

"Alas," sighed Chavigny, "he commands the King's ear. One cannot overlook him. He is now Master of the Horse."

"As was Chalais!"

There was something sinister in this remark. Sixteen years before, Chalais, Master of the Horse, had been beheaded for engaging in similar intrigues.

"Yes," continued the Cardinal, "like Chalais, he is led by women. Only, in those days the names of the women were Anne of Austria, and Marie of Chevreuse, while today . . ."

The Cardinal made a gesture of scorn. As he mentioned the name of the Duchess of Chevreuse, his lifelong enemy, there was a certain note of pride, almost of tenderness, in his voice.

"Proud Chevreuse, against whom I have fought sixteen years without cease! All those whom she incited against me have been crushed. Yet her antagonism remains unabated. On account of her I have had to humiliate and lower a woman whom I hold above all others—the Queen of France! And even today, although kept carefully in exile, she opposes me, and is still powerful and dangerous!"

Chavigny understood his master. He knew that underneath the cold exterior of the statesman, there was a warm, even romantic heart.

"Monseigneur," he said in alarm, "do you fear her?"

The Cardinal had already gained control of himself.

"Not at all!" he said haughtily.

There was a knock at the door, and an assistant entered:

"Monseigneur, there is a man here who says that he has come from Sedan."

"From Sedan? Show him in at once!"

The door opened, and a Capuchin friar with a florid face entered. The good father bowed, but did not advance.

"You've just come from Sedan?" asked the Cardinal, scrutinizing the newcomer carefully.

The Capuchin nodded.

"Alone?"

"I met the man."

"It was the one we were after?"

"Yes, Your Eminence."

"The wool-stapler of the Rue Grenetail?"

"Yes! The man could be recognized anywhere; a tall, thin, impudent braggart and clown."

The Cardinal turned toward Chavigny.

"We have not been deceived. He is the worthy brother of the actress of Marais, Mlle. Mitou, Minou . . . whatever her name is."

Then, turning to the friar:

"Continue!"

"I travelled with him for quite a long distance, and succeeded in gaining his confidence. He is an impudent wag. He dared to upbraid me about our holy religion. . . ."

"Continue!" interrupted the Cardinal with an air of complete indifference.

Rather disconcerted, the friar began again:

"He is also a very vain person. I questioned him about his high connections, of which he kept boasting. After constantly urging him on, I found out that he often saw the Princes in Sedan."

Richelieu interrupted suddenly:

"To whom do you refer? I did not realize that there were any princes in Sedan except M. de Soissons. As for M. de Bouillon, he is only a Duke."

"That's just it! The Duke pretends that he is the ruler of Sedan."

"We will take care of this pretension."

"This man also boasted that he was expected here by three noblemen. I protested that he must be exaggerating."

"Good, whom did he name?"

"Messieurs de Guise, de Beaufort . . ."

"Didn't he mention one more name?"

"He mentioned as one of his great friends Monsieur le Grand!"

The statesman had a moment of exultation:

"Cinq-Mars! I was certain of it!"

He walked quickly toward the Capuchin.

"You made him prisoner?"

"I intended to, Monseigneur, but the wretch escaped me. He is very clever, and slipped through my fingers. Near Chalons we met a troop of His Majesty's dragoons. Pfft! Before I had a chance to speak to the commanding officer, the devil had slipped away. He disappeared up a cross-road and I couldn't follow him on my poor mule."

"Clumsy fool," growled the irritated Cardinal. "You nearly had the go-between whom I am most anxious to catch, do you realize that? I am positive that Cinq-Mars corresponds with Sedan, but the proof, the proof. . . . We must find this man at any price, if he isn't already in Paris."

"I don't believe he is, Monseigneur. I borrowed a fast horse from the dragoon, and came to Paris with the utmost speed. And I have inquired at all the gates of the city—no one who answers to his description has been seen."

The Cardinal was deep in thought; the friar continued:

"As soon as he knows that he is recognized, he will bury himself in the house of some friend. If he comes out, it will only be because he thinks that he has been forgotten."

"Well, no matter, you must be on your way at once. Here is a warrant. It will give you the assistance of any troops you may meet. Go, and do not return without this man."

The Capuchin bowed low:

"I shall try to the best of my ability, Your Eminence! And I shall bring this person back, if God is willing!"

As soon as the good father had left, the minister turned to Chavigny:

"What did I tell you? The storm is gathering! It is for us to keep it from breaking. To our task,—it is high time!"

At this moment there was a soft knock on the door, and the assistant appeared bearing a letter.

"Where from?"

"Chantilly."

"At last!"

Breaking the seal, the Cardinal quickly glanced over the letter; his face became more clouded.

"Yes, certainly, it is high time. Read!"

He handed the letter to his secretary. Chavigny took the message, and read aloud:

" 'The King went hunting . . .' "

"Pass on!"

" 'M. le Grand accompanied His Majesty to the chase, but the King returned alone. M. de Cinq-Mars has not reappeared at the Château.' "

"You see! He didn't return to the Château. I tell you, this man is engaged in a plot. He is a dangerous snake!"

"We must know where he spent the day."

"Where? Why, *parbleu,* at the house of his Duchess! At the Hôtel de Nevers!"

"Well, we shall soon find out. Here is the observer from the Pont Neuf."

A doubtful looking person had just glided through the half-open door.

"Step forward, Roussin. What news?"

"This afternoon," began the police-official, "a brawl started in front of the marionnette stand . . ."

"That is a matter for the civil judge," broke in the Cardinal dryly. "What then?"

"A tall, lanky fellow with a hooked nose and a young soldier . . ."

"What then, I ask you?"

The man seemed nonplussed.

"His Eminence wants to know if anything of a suspicious nature took place at the Hôtel de Nevers," whispered Chavigny.

"No, Monseigneur, no! I saw several gentlemen enter the house."

"Who?"

"Why, M. de Guise, M. l'Abbé de Gondi, M. de Beaufort . . ."

"All my enemies! All! And what else?"

"A carriage came from the Court with a young lady inside. . . ."

"Her name?"

"Ah, I don't know. She was as lovely as an angel, fair . . ."

"We must discover this unknown woman's name."

Chavigny nodded in agreement.

"Is that all?" asked Richelieu.

"No, there was also a gentleman whom I did not recognize. A tall young man. He seemed to have made a long trip, for his horse was covered with foam. I heard them ask him on his arrival if there were any news from Chantilly."

"Cinq-Mars, *parbleu!*"

"The long-legged devil and his friend the soldier also entered the place, but without meaning to, because . . ."

"Oh, don't bother about them! Did you see no other person? Think carefully."

"Yes, toward evening a well-dressed, powerfully built gentleman arrived with a large escort. They all had their faces covered, so I cannot give their names. . . ."

"Who can he be?" asked the Cardinal, rather nervously. "Well-dressed, powerfully built?"

"About dusk another brawl started. Paris is no longer a safe place. Some ruffians attacked a carriage . . ."

This time, plunged in his reflections, the statesman did not interrupt. The police-official took the opportunity to describe in detail the affair, with certain additional touches about the effectiveness of the police. It was evident that this subject interested him more than the comings and goings at the Hôtel de Nevers.

"The audacity of these scoundrels," he said in concluding this tale, to which no one had paid the slightest attention, "the audacity of these scoundrels was without limit. They dared to pretend that they were followers of Monsieur . . ."

The Cardinal pounced on this remark:

"You were saying?"

"They said they were followers of Monseigneur the Duke of Orleans," exclaimed the spy.

"Where did these so-called ruffians come from?"

"From the side of the bridge toward the Porte de Nesle."

"And they spoke of Monsieur?"

"One of them mentioned his name. . . ."

"There can be no doubt, it was he! He was not present at the reception this afternoon."

The poor police-officer opened his eyes in terror as he heard the King's brother mentioned as a common malefactor.

"Go, that is enough. Be more observant another time."

Master Roussin left.

Richelieu paced the room feverishly and with growing impatience.

"Yes, there they all are. Beaufort and his Montbazon, Gondi and his Guénémée, Guise and his Princess Anne, Cinq-Mars, and finally—Monsieur! Oh, if only I knew what plans they were making. In their fear, they will probably try anything."

His domineering eyes became defiant.

"What's the difference! They won't have time to move. I shall crush them all!"

The Cardinal had worked himself into a savage temper.

"Yes, all, I'll crush them all. All traitors inside and outside of France. Bouillon will pay for his disloyalty by losing Sedan—for a long time I have wanted that place, but the fool has held out against me. Duke Charles will be forced to add the precious jewel of Lorraine to the lily of France. Princes of the Peace, they call themselves!

Do my friends Soissons and Guise think they are above punishment? Let them be careful! Montmorency's scaffold is just the right size for them too. And as for this Gondi and this petty M. le Grand—if necessary, I shall send their Nevers and Guénémée to a convent, and let them cool their heels in the depths of some dungeon."

He was forced to pause to catch his breath. He began again with a sarcastic sneer:

"There remains Monsieur. He is not yet so dishonored that I cannot disgrace him even more. I want him to be so humbled that he can never rise again. I shall make this son of France an informer—yes, the hangman of his accomplices. Then we shall see if there still remains a gentleman who will touch the cowardly, defiled, bloody hand of the wretch!"

Chavigny remained silent, shuddering.

The old man was panting:

"We must act at once. Strike before they are united. They shall all die when the time comes—each one, alone!"

CHAPTER IX

ENTER GIULIO MAZARINI

A SOFT, musical voice came suddenly from the end of the room.

"Too late, Monseigneur, too late! They are united. It is an accomplished fact!"

The Cardinal turned quickly. Through the open door, the slender figure of a priest had just entered noiselessly. The newcomer remained at the threshold, smiling.

"Monsieur de Mazarin!" exclaimed Richelieu.

Signor Giulio Mazarini, for it was he, stepped forward, bowed humbly before the Cardinal, and then straightened up, still smiling.

"Yes," he repeated, "the trick has been turned! They have signed an agreement."

"When?"

"This evening, at the Hôtel de Rohan in the presence of Guénémée."

The prime minister with his eagle-like glance, stared at the suave Italian. The latter bore the examination with perfect equanimity.

"What then do you know?" demanded the minister.

"Everything, Monseigneur," said the little priest quietly. And in that whining voice which lent a certain childishness to his most weighty statements, Mazarin unfolded to his astonished listeners the complete plan of the conspirators.

Monsieur, with the Duke of Guise, was to join the Princes at Sedan, and, after collecting his troops, was to enter France. The brother of the King could now leave without any difficulty. Through the aid of Gondi and Cinq-Mars, he was again in the King's favor. As the Italian spoke in his slow, deliberate way, everything became clear.

One felt that this slight priest, inferior to his listeners in great conceptions, surpassed them in intrigue. In this he was in his element; he moved with ease. He pried into hidden secrets, and sounded the depths of men's thoughts, with that complete contempt for human beings which resulted from the knowledge that he himself was so contemptible.

"The stage is set," he concluded, "the parts have been allotted: Monsieur de Cinq-Mars will conduct the ceremonies about the King; Monsieur de Gondi will act in Paris, where he distributes alms to the bullies who compose such a large part of his archbishopric."

"Where have you obtained this information?"

"From a—*lady*," answered the cleric with a modest blush.

He continued:

"Lorraine and Spain will then be able to enter France under the noble escort of our friends the Princes."

The Cardinal, dominated by the cool logic of the subtle Italian, had listened in silence, but at this remark his pride rose in revolt:

"Impossible! That would be high treason! The Princes will think twice before doing that."

Mazarin broke abruptly into the Cardinal's speech, although he maintained the humble manner from which he never departed.

"Your Eminence, His Royal Highness the Duke of Orleans, only brother of the King, is not the man to refrain from profitable treason, provided he is sure of success."

He had stated it most crudely, but there was a subtle irony in the meticulous care with which he included the titles of this Prince whom he was accusing of such shameless villainy.

"As for the Count of Soissons, he will be the second member of his family to have drawn sword against his King."

This casual reference to the well-known treason of the High Constable chilled the hearts of the listeners. The man who, without the slightest qualm, could descend to such depths was assuredly a master-hand in his field.

The Cardinal bowed his noble head a moment. He seemed to suffer as he listened to the intriguing Italian unfold the treachery of these people. His enemies, it is true; but princes of the royal blood—a brother and a cousin of the King. Again he took exception to the priest's statement:

"But the Marshal of Chatillon will protect Sedan. No foreigner can set foot in France without at once being driven out."

The priest answered in an effectedly casual manner:

"Monsieur de Chatillon, now a mere marshal, is too good a diplomat to oppose the future Regent of France."

This thrust went home. The King, ill and old before his time, was likely to die any day, and then these rebels would become the counsellors and officers of the Regency, under the leadership of Monsieur.

Signor Mazarini, always humble and deferential, began to dominate the situation. The old statesman bowed his head again. Slowly, he said:

"The die is cast! It is a struggle to the death, with our one hope in the doubtful, vacillating support of the King."

"Unless Your Eminence looks for another support, more reliable . . ."

"Who?"

"Her Majesty the Queen."

The Cardinal raised his head. To hear this intriguing priest mention that name which he could never pronounce without emotion, was almost more than he could endure.

"The Queen can no longer do anything," he said dryly.

"Here, yes. But outside of France . . . ! Her Majesty is still granddaughter of Charles V, sister of the King of Spain, and Archduchess of Flanders. The Queen can do everything."

Richelieu listened in astonishment. What was the drift of this advice?

The other continued calmly:

"The Princes must have troops to enter France. Neither

Lorraine nor Spain will help our King, the son of Henry IV. Yet, for a persecuted sister, for the noble, martyred Princess who must be restored to her proper position . . ."

The Cardinal interrupted abruptly:

"So, in your opinion, the key to the situation is the Queen."

Mazarin bowed, but, in his steady voice, corrected the prelate:

"The key to the situation is Monsieur Bernard."

Chavigny and Richlieu looked at each other incredulously. This plain name of an unknown man sounded most incongruous after the illustrious titles that had just been mentioned. Both men were mystified.

"M. Bernard?" repeated the Cardinal.

"Yes, Your Eminence. You know whom I mean!"

"Are you trifling with me, Monsieur de Mazarin?"

"Oh, very well! Let Monseigneur judge for himself whether I am trifling."

Leaning toward the Cardinal, he pronounced very softly a name that Chavigny could not hear. The Cardinal started back in amazement. With a wave of his hand he intimated to Chavigny that he wished to be left alone with the Italian. As soon as the door was closed on the Secretary, he turned to Mazarin, and, taking his hands, said:

"You say that that person . . . ?"

"In Paris."

"Has she seen the Queen?"

"Not yet, but she will. She has already seen some one who is near to her."

"Who?"

"One of the Queen's attendants."

"Which one?"

"Mademoiselle de Cernay . . ."

"Speak, speak, my dear Mazarin! Tell me everything you know."

"I shall, Monseigneur. For a long time I have been watching events in England. Elsewhere, Your Eminence has open, avowed enemies. But there, where the Queen is the sister of our King, they take great care to make it appear that we have no adversaries. Naturally, I was mistrustful of what might be happening there. So I entered into communication with a person whom I highly recommend to Your Eminence. She is a lady of noble name and great beauty: the Countess of Suttland."

"The Countess of Suttland?"

"Yes. Her brother is a Scottish nobleman—Lord MacGregor, a friend of Lord Montague. Thus my information comes from trustworthy sources. You will soon see for yourself, for the proof has come to Paris recently."

"How did you come across it?"

Mazarin lowered his eyes modestly, and said in a rather complacent tone:

"The lady has been kind enough to suggest that I resemble slightly a gentleman whom she knew—the Duke of Buckingham."

Richelieu shuddered at this reference, and then looked closely at his assistant. Yes, the man was really handsome, with his regular features and apparent nobility, his engaging smile and soft eyes.

"Yes, it's true," he murmured to himself, a touch of envy in his voice. "He will be happier than I. . . . He will have his way with women!"

Mazarin continued in his easy manner:

"I believe that Monseigneur knows the father of these two persons. He was once a friend of yours, Lord Angus Mac Diarmid."

The Cardinal looked up in surprise:

"He! Yes, I did know him. He is still alive? I thought him dead."

"Alas, the poor old nobleman is but an empty shell. The brutal death of a close friend shook him deeply, and since then he has been living in retirement in his castle at Kildar. Perhaps Your Eminence does not remember that he was a close friend of the Duke of Buckingham."

Mazarin stole a quick look at his master, and noticed the great emotion these words produced in him. Then he continued smoothly:

"A final misfortune has helped to stagger the old man. He was greatly attached to a baby, the adopted son of the illustrious Buckingham. The poor little child disappeared in mysterious circumstances."

Richelieu seemed to be more and more restless. He interrupted:

"Pass over that, and come to the matter at hand."

Mazarin smiled almost imperceptibly:

"I have, Your Eminence, I have. It is through my beautiful friend the Countess and her noble brother that I have this information about our most worthy M. Bernard. They forewarned me of the movements of this interesting 'gentleman.' As soon as he decided to cross the Channel, I had only to follow his trail."

"And this pursuit led you back to Paris?"

"Exactly, Monseigneur, to Paris, to the top of the Montagne Sainte Geneviève, opposite the Collège de Navarre."

The Cardinal could not forbear a reproach:

"Why didn't you let me know of this sooner?"

"I was loath to disturb Your Eminence before I was positive of my information."

The cunning fellow was obviously lying, but the Cardinal restrained himself from further comment. He needed Mazarin.

"And, further, I feared that haste might ruin everything. Your Eminence is sometimes expeditious. I realize that you do not threaten your opponents."

"What do you mean?"

"That my illustrious master usually ends by imprisoning those who annoy him—or killing them!"

"What would you do in my place?"

"I," answered the benevolent Italian, "I should prefer to toy with them!"

"What would you do in my place?"

Here we find an explanation of the political methods of these two men, so completely different in every way. One attacked with the teeth of a brutal watch-dog; the other hid his cat's claws under a smooth surface. Richelieu put to death the enemies of the State; Mazarin "toyed" with them.

He continued:

"Having discovered the nest, I hold the bird."

"You have, I trust, had a thorough search made of the place?"

"Oh, Monseigneur, an official search is a serious matter. It scares the birds. I have simply made a little visit."

"And what did you find?"

For a second time Mazarin lowered his eyes humbly, and, in the most innocent voice, answered:

"Nothing!"

"What, nothing?" exclaimed the Cardinal with an air of doubt and expostulation.

"Alas, Monseigneur! The evening before the bird had flown away."

Richelieu again began to pace the room feverishly.

"What a long way we've got with all your subtleties!"

"Wait, Monseigneur, wait until I finish. We only hold one end of the thread, that which binds M. Bernard. But there is another, and at the end of the other is a—great lady! . . ."

"The Queen," broke in the Cardinal, impatiently.

"Yes, yes, quite right! Well, Your Eminence, your humble servant feels certain that between M. Bernard and the Queen, there is something deeper than mere friendship—I feel that they hold a . . ."

"Well, what?"

"A secret!"

"A secret? Speak; what do you know?"

Again Mazarin lowered his eyes.

"Nothing, as I have said, nothing at all. But Your

Eminence will know this secret tomorrow. And if you know it, you will no longer have anything to fear from M. Bernard, or his illustrious friend. Your Eminence will hold the Queen in the palm of your hand."

Richelieu was now completely subdued. With great slyness, the Italian had led him into this present position. The prime minister realized that his cunning assistant had not told him all the truth, that he was holding back much that was important. But he could not afford to quarrel with the man. His present position was insecure, and here, perhaps, was a way to strengthen it.

"Very well," he said, "I shall see M. Bernard. By the way, where is he now? For you told me, I believe, that you had lost his trail."

"Did I say that? I think Your Eminence is mistaken. After tonight, you may see this person, if you so desire."

"Splendid! And, to make sure that the bird does not try his wings again, I intend to put him in a cage with solid iron bars."

Mazarin shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Alas, Monseigneur, alas!" he said regretfully.

"And why 'alas'?"

"In cages birds don't sing . . . !"

"Ah, I see. Again you are right. Where may I see him?"

"Monsieur Bernard? The bird will spend this night with the Carmelites."

"How do you know that?"

"A lady, near to the Queen, who is kind enough to take an interest in me . . ."

"A woman again! Decidedly, M. Mazarin, you are a master-hand."

"Oh, Monseigneur, only your servant—your very humble servant."

The Cardinal quickly prepared to leave the room. But Mazarin remained motionless.

"What is it now?" asked Richelieu, surprised.

"For this enterprise, I may need, perhaps, a trusty man."

The great statesman had never known fear. He looked at his timorous companion scornfully.

"There's Chavigny."

"No. Monsieur de Chavigny is faithful, most trusty, but there might arise a little situation in which a swordsman would be of distinct assistance . . ."

Richelieu hesitated a moment, then, after a short reflection, made up his mind.

"Chavigny!" he called.

The Secretary could not have been far away, for he entered at once.

"Chavigny, who is on guard tonight?"

"A lieutenant of the Musketeers, I believe."

"His name?"

"I'll go and make certain."

A moment later Chavigny reappeared.

"Who?" repeated the Cardinal impatiently.

"M. d'Artagnan, Monseigneur."

The minister's eyes sparkled for an instant:

"Splendid!" he murmured. "It's just as I thought."

Then, in a loud voice he ordered:

"Bring in M. d'Artagnan."

CHAPTER X

AT THE SIGN OF *THE PINEAPPLE*

IF the Mysterious Cavalier had been able to overhear this conversation, he would probably have been in less doubt about the fate that had befallen his precious casket. But he had no idea that his affairs could interest such important persons as His Eminence the Cardinal-Minister, and the Secretary of State, Giulio Mazarini.

Any suspicions the young man had, centred around the enigmatic M. Bernard, who had figured so strangely in his unfortunate adventure. He knew nothing definite about M. Bernard. This man seemed to him to be one of those mythical, evil geniuses who leave misery in their path. The poor Cavalier had lost everything except hope and fortitude.

While accompanying his silent friend from the Place Royale, he passed over in his mind the events of this memorable day. He asked himself with a feeling of some doubt where his star was leading him. Should he follow it along the course it had pointed out? But yet, how could he calmly abandon the search for his fortune—stolen he knew not how!

When he had told Cyrano of the catastrophe, his friend had first broken out in exclamations, then muttered something like an oath, and finally, in an authoritative manner, led him away at a fast pace. As the Cavalier tried to keep abreast of his friend, he attempted to ask him where they were going. He received the laconic answer: "You'll soon see!"

In the meantime the poor soldier saw nothing but the silhouettes of houses, and the bright sky overhead. At last they came to the Seine, and stepped onto a bridge flanked with wooden houses. It had just been completed; clearly it was the Notre Dame bridge.

Cyrano walked more slowly. At last they were coming to something. They entered a dirty, winding little street. They were in the Cité. Then they passed the door of the church, Sainte Magdelaine, and reached the Rue de la Juiverie.

Cyrano stopped in front of a low shop on the ground floor of a heavy building, which seemed about to topple over into the street. Through the thick windows filtered the light of a lantern which tried vainly to penetrate the darkness. The Cavalier could make out the emblem over the door, a pineapple.

Ah, so it was a wine-shop! That was good. Was it here then that his friend was leading him in such a tortuous course, as if they were conspirators?

"Go in!" said the poet. "Here we shall be quiet and see things more clearly."

Having uttered these oracular words, Cyrano entered, pushing his astonished friend in front of him. The famous tavern of *The Pineapple* has left its name in literary history as the meeting place of seven or eight generations of poets. Here came men who in their thirst for glory did not forget other kinds of thirsts, including the most respectable thirst for the juice of the grape.

This low room with its smoky rafters dated from the reign of Charles VII. At these tables, during the last two centuries, had sat hosts of celebrated men, ranging from the exquisite poet of the *Ballades des Dames du Temps Jadis* to the immortal author of *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*. At the beginning of the present reign, it had sheltered the leading free-thinkers of Paris. Here men delighted to rail against God and the Pope. They consoled themselves for their lost liberty by drowning their sorrows in the elixirs to be had at this worthy tavern. Here, as people said, "madness was sold by the bottle."

Poets and swordsmen joined in this madness. Famous noblemen such as the jolly Retz and the valiant Duke of Harcourt, came here to quaff the flowing bowl. The beautiful, affected society ladies invented a new name for men who left their incomparable company to enter this den: "doglivers." But the jolly inmates of *The Pineapple* answered by applauding the scandalous fabrications of Tallemant des Réaux. With his coarse humor, this man mocked and mimicked the Platonic loves and idealized speech of the Hôtel de Rambouillet and the Place Royale, which were finally done to death by the biting satire of Molière.

All those who chafed under the double tyranny of the "perfect language" and the sullen politics of the day gathered at this tavern. This intimate group was significantly called: *The Society of Gormandizers*. They continued Rabelais' noble tradition of "inhaling the wine"; and the even more ancient gastronomic pursuits of the poor famished vagabond, François Villon.

It was into this extraordinary place that Cyrano and the Cavalier, fresh from the brilliant salons of the Hôtel de Guénémée, entered. At this late hour the room, heavy with smoke, was crowded with a merry group of drinkers and feasters. Impoverished poets gobbled their food side by side with roistering Musketeers, whose hilarity was as much the result of their natural high-spirits as of the wine they drank. Court poets touched glasses with their Mæcenases. Young dandies with curled locks sat opposite pretty, sly actresses and their doubtful companions. Even grave judges from the Châtelet were present, but they had left behind their robes and wigs. There was an infernal din: shrill shouts, deep laughs, loud boasting, the clinking of glasses, and the clatter of forks.

"So this is what Cyrano calls a quiet place . . . !" thought the Cavalier sadly.

He had no time to complete this reflection. His friend, who had steered him through the maze of tables and stools with the air of an habitué of the place, had just stopped at the farther end of the room. There, in front of a table, a huge man sat alone.

This corpulent person very nearly took up all the room at the table. With his barrel-like stomach and flushed face, he was the perfect personification of the Spirit of Food and Drink. In front of him was a huge feast, and the honest glutton was methodically attacking a mountain of food such as would have supplied an ample meal for several persons. He only interrupted his eating to drink from a large cup, which was emptied as soon as it was filled.

On seeing him, Cyrano uttered a sigh of relief.

"Bacchus be praised!" he murmured, "we've arrived in time. He's still in the preliminary stage. The oracle is not yet drunk!"

And without any more ado he pushed forward his young friend:

"Saint-Amant," he said, "I present to you my friend, the Mysterious Cavalier."

The jolly gourmand held his fork in mid-air.

"The *What* Cavalier?"

"Mysterious," declared the poet peremptorily.

"Ah, very well. Sit down, both of you."

He pointed to two stools opposite him.

"Here we are, 'Paunch',"—this was the gourmand's popular nick-name—"fresh from the Place Royale."

"Don't waste words on that place, Savinien, my son. I understand your dismal air. The young man must have been frightfully amused at the 'Place Dorique'!"

"Ha! he wasn't so bored as you may think. . . . However, we've come here for a different reason. And, first of all, you are to know that the Cavalier is my best friend. . . ."

"Since when?" asked Saint-Amant.

"Since this afternoon, three o'clock by the bell of the Samaritaine. It was at that moment that he had the courage to keep me from being cut to pieces by the good people of the Pont Neuf."

CHAPTER XI

A CONSPIRACY OF POETS

This quiet statement of the Gascon's so startled Saint-Amant that he nearly choked.

"The devil! What are you trying to tell me!" he exclaimed, after a long drink.

"Yes, it's true," answered Cyrano. "You haven't heard about it yet? I killed Brioché's monkey."

"What? You . . ."

"Killed the monkey! And I fear I also mistreated the master, as well as a few other bothersome people of no importance."

"Oh, that's different! Quite different!" declared the giant sententiously.

These incoherent revelations plunged the jovial colossus into deep meditation. Suddenly he let out a tremendous laugh:

"A splendid subject to put into burlesque verse," he said. "I shall compose a new epic on the Monkey of the Pont Neuf!"

"This is no laughing matter, my friend. We have something serious to talk to you about."

"Really? Be clear then, for you have been speaking in riddles, like the Sibyl."

"You're right. I'll tell you all from the very beginning."

The great gourmand quickly stretched out his arm.

"Savinien, my son, you're about to begin a speech . . . wait!"

Calling a waiter, he said:

"Quick! a drink for these gentlemen. There's nothing more tiring than to have to speak with a dry throat."

As soon as the jug had been brought, and the cups filled, he seemed more at ease.

"There, I'll listen now."

"Well, then, the Cavalier arrived in Paris last night from the army in Flanders."

"Which corps?" questioned Saint-Amant. "Gassion? Rantzau?"

"Gassion," replied the Cavalier.

"Just so!"

"As I said before, he saved my life at the risk of his own. Later in the evening he snatched from the claws of that cursed Monsieur and his *Vauriens* a charming attendant of the Queen. Tonight he had his first encounter at the Hôtel de Rohan, where he was able both to win the good graces of the Duchesses and Madame de Guénémée, and the bad graces of the Abbé de Gondi."

The listener nodded his head admiringly.

"That last exploit surpasses the others. The boy doesn't waste time!"

"Wait! You don't know anything yet! In the meantime he has managed to let himself be robbed of an immense fortune which he carried with him."

"A fortune?"

"An enormous one, my friend! On his arrival in Paris the Cavalier here possessed a boundless fortune. In a twinkling this treasure has been snatched away. He who yesterday evening at this time was as rich as Crœsus is now slightly poorer than Job."

Saint-Amant had ceased his gastronomic exercises. His bewildered eyes travelled from Cyrano to the Cavalier. Were they trying to mystify him? No, those two faces were as serious as those of judges: the soldier with his youthful air of sagacity, and the poet with his face flushed from his recital.

"Let's have a round of drinks!" he advised sagely. "*In vino veritas!*"

"But," said Cyrano, "I see that you don't understand this clearly. It's because you haven't heard the history of the casket."

"What casket?"

"The casket in which was sealed the Cavalier's fortune."

"It was in a casket, then?"

"Saint-Amant, my dear, good fellow, you who are usually so keen are as befuddled as an old woman tonight. Apparently, you don't understand anything."

"It's because I haven't had enough to drink," said his companion philosophically.

Cyrano turned to his friend who, listening in silence, was wondering what this was all about.

"Tancrède, my dear boy, I'm going to ask you for an exhibition of confidence. This gentleman is Marc-Antoine Gerard de Saint-Amant. Under the wanton disguise of a great drunkard, he modestly hides a splendid wit and deep wisdom. . . ."

"Savinien, you fill me with confusion!"

"Keep quiet, you great hogshead! There will never be enough confusion in this world to fill you! Behold him, Cavalier; for him I have the very deepest affection and . . ."

"Which I return . . ."

"Will you let me speak! Before he took his place upon this bench where he works up an appetite writing burlesque poems, he served with distinction on sea and in foreign lands. For his secret missions, he was honored with the King's confidence. He has been in England, Flanders, the Germanies, Italy."

"Turkey, also! . . . Those are dismal countries, which lack the most essential things. There are no good taverns there!"

"To sum up in two words: the valor of his sword is no less than that of his fork, and the capacities of his heart exceed even those of his stomach."

The Cavalier listened, more and more amazed, to this strange oration uttered by Cyrano in a most serious tone of voice.

"That is why I brought you here," concluded the Gascon, slapping the boy on the shoulder. "In view of our serious difficulty, I thought it proper to call on the mind, and, if necessary, on the sword of our friend."

"They are yours, my son . . . they belong to you and to your friend!" said the great gourmand cordially as he attacked another plate.

"Zounds, will you keep quiet! Saint-Amant is also a man of great resourcefulness, and is in favor with certain high persons whose assistance may be of aid to us. The beautiful and learned Duchess of Nevers values . . ."

"Princess Marie deigns to honor me with her friendship!"

At this name, de Nevers, which called to mind the memory of his lovely godmother, the Cavalier felt definitely encouraged.

"So I am going to ask you," concluded the poet, "to authorize me to put at the discretion of this good gentleman that part of your history which you cared to entrust to me. I shall answer for him as for myself!"

Without a moment's hesitation, the Cavalier answered:

"M. de Bergerac, in entrusting you with my secret, I allowed you to use it as you think best. It is for you alone to decide how much of it shall be repeated, and how much kept quiet, so as not to compromise other persons."

"There's a noble answer!" approved Saint-Amant, extending his large hand. "Spoken like a soldier."

Then, turning to Cyrano:

"Ah! So it is really a serious matter?" he asked, lighting a long-stemmed clay pipe.

"You may decide for yourself. The Cavalier does not know his family; he was brought up in a haphazard fashion by mercenary soldiers."

"A fine education, that!"

"One of the soldiers preserved, in this casket, certain papers on which the Cavalier bases his hopes for a fortune. Well, this man was killed!"

"Regrettable event! But one not foreseen in such a profession."

"Before dying, he was able to confess to a priest, and revealed to him the secret he had held so long."

"It centred about our young friend?"

"Just so! But the Cavalier knows none of the details. He only knows that all will be explained as soon as he deposits the casket in the hands of a third person . . ."

"May I ask who this is?"

"The Cavalier does not know. The casket is to arrive at its destination through an intermediary."

"And who is he?"

Cyrano looked inquiringly at the Cavalier.

"M. de Guitaut!" answered the latter without hesitation.

"M. de Guitaut? The Captain of the Queen's Guards?"

"The same!"

"Right! And—have you seen M. de Guitaut?"

"I let him know of the mission with which I was entrusted. He told me to 'come without delay, with the casket.'"

"What then?"

"The day after my arrival, during my absence, the portmanteau which contained this treasure was rifled. The casket has disappeared."

Saint-Amant drew the long stem from his mouth; clouds of heavy smoke escaped from his lips—a sign of great emotion. Then, leaning forward, he asked:

"Did M. de Guitaut know the Cavalier's address?"

"No!" answered the young man, surprised at this question.

"Could he have followed you back?"

"I didn't return to my lodgings."

Saint-Amant leaned back at ease:

"The wind doesn't blow in that direction then. It would have surprised me if such a loyal and faithful officer . . . Continue."

"That's all!"

"It is very little! Now, let's see. Except for the casket, nothing has disappeared?"

"Nothing—even my purse remained untouched."

"Did any one know of the existence of this little box?"

"No one knows anything about it except ourselves . . . and M. de Guitaut."

"And the thief," added Saint-Amant. "This is becoming most obscure."

He kept pulling at his pipe, and then, from the centre of a dense cloud, he asked:

"Tell me, where are you staying?"

"In a little house near the Collège de Navarre; the house of Barbette."

"And this happened on the day after your arrival?"

"The very next day!"

For a few moments the smoke screen became even thicker. Saint-Amant was arranging his thoughts.

"Have you any fellow-lodgers?"

"Not one. The woman in charge has the first floor and I the second."

"This landlady, the Barbette you spoke of, what sort of a woman is she?"

"A strange little gossip, somewhat insane it seemed to me. She kept speaking of some man who had occupied my rooms for several days, and had left the evening before. I remember an amusing detail. This former resident had left suddenly *on account of the wind . . .*"

"On account of the wind?" repeated Saint-Amant from his cloud.

"Yes!" answered the Cavalier, surprised. "Does that put you on the scent?"

"Let's go carefully. The name of this other person?"

"M. Bernard!"

The pipe was hastily lighted again.

"Bernard? . . . No! I don't recognize the name. And yet, the wind!"

"You think, as I do, that this Bernard has some hand in my case. It's he, or one of his men, who . . ."

"Here, not too quickly! You're jumping at conclusions. No! Everything, on the contrary, indicates that M. Bernard is not the thief."

"Who, then, is?"

"Well, it's more likely to be . . . Yes, *morbleu!*"

"Who?" asked the Cavalier, as though ready to run the thief through with his sword. "Who?"

"*The wind!*" came the quiet voice from the centre of the cloud.

The two friends looked astonished. They were both eager to ask questions. But with his methodical slowness, Saint-Amant had started to fill a second pipe. They had to wait until this serious operation was finished.

"It's amazingly clear," continued the soothsayer, blowing toward the rafters a large puff, "it can only be the wind! If no one knew of the existence of the casket, no one could go there to look for it."

"But it has disappeared!"

"Of course! The man who discovered it was not looking for it. He was searching for something else. And we know what."

"We know *what?*" exclaimed the two friends together.

"He was looking for M. Bernard!"

"Then," cried the Cavalier, "if they weren't after me or my casket, they ought to return it to me."

"H'm!" grunted the giant of *The Pineapple.* "Now just a minute. . . . No, that doesn't follow!"

"I can't understand what earthly good it would be to the enemies of this Bernard."

"*Pardieu!* What an impatient young man you are! We must find out whether this unexpected discovery does not perhaps interest those whom fate so kindly and unexpectedly assisted.

"Whom do you suspect?" asked Cyrano anxiously.

"I've told you: the wind!"

"Oh, nonsense, you're getting on my nerves with your confounded wind! I never liked riddles. When I fight I like to look my adversary in the eyes. Explain yourself. *Sandious!* what do you mean by 'the wind'?"

"Savinien, my son, you are more impatient than your friend. Be satisfied with this explanation. I can't give you a better one tonight. Tomorrow . . . is another day!"

"What shall we do in the meantime?"

"Nothing!"

Cyrano jumped up impatiently. The other calmed him with a wave of the arm:

"Nothing, as long as we don't hold the key to the riddle—that is, M. Bernard!"

The petulant Cavalier exclaimed naïvely:

"Will that be long?"

The giant broke into a hearty laugh.

"Really, little one, you're asking too much. All I can say is that from now on you can depend, body and soul, on Saint-Amant!"

"And on de Bergerac!" declared Cyrano promptly.

"Thank you, my friends! Thank you, from the bottom of my heart."

The three friends shook hands solemnly.

"Starting tomorrow," said Saint-Amant, "we'll get down to business. I'll see the Duchess of Nevers. She knows many people, and, who can tell, perhaps our man!"

"Oh, no, not such a low rascal!"

"Ha! You can never be sure! Come, let's sup. It's the best thing we can do now. All this excitement should have given us an appetite."

"Faith," admitted the young man, "I haven't had a bite since leaving the Louvre this morning. I'm beginning to feel hungry!"

"Oh, bravo! That's splendid!" applauded the gourmand.

Saint-Amant noticed the astonished glances the young soldier stole at the remains of his recent repast, and hastened to give an explanation:

"I've had only my dinner. Now it's time for supper!"

The Cavalier remained humble before such an admirable appetite. In the meantime Saint-Amant ordered the meal, which he made large and substantial, not forgetting to complete it with carefully chosen wines.

A few minutes later the only noise that could be heard from this particular corner of the room was the cheerful clatter of forks and glasses. "Paunch" had not been guilty of vain boasting. He did honor to these dishes with an ardor that would have led one to believe he had been fasting for days. Cyrano, deep in thought, drank more than he ate. As for the Cavalier, he kept up with his two companions, drinking and eating with a fine youthful appetite. Saint-Amant looked at him with a connoisseur's eye, and showed his approval by pleased nods of his head.

"Savinien," he said, his mouth filled with the wing of a chicken, "what I like about your friend is that his misfortunes haven't taken away his appetite."

"Yes," answered the poet absent-mindedly, still deep in his dreams.

"*Morbleu!* You're not eating at all. What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing!"

"H'm! I'll wager you are pondering something—and I know what!"

The big man continued pitilessly:

"Lad, you must know that this man Bergerac, brave to the point of rashness, fears just one thing in this world. . . . And what sort of thing? A mere nothing! Judge for yourself. Cyrano, the fearless, trembles before—a hat!"

"Saint-Amant!" protested the swordsman, purple in the face.

"It must be admitted that this hat is red!"

The Cavalier, amused, laughed heartily:

"A strange country, this," he said. "People here have no fear of God or the devil, but half of them are terrified by 'the wind that blows,' and the other half trembles before a hat!"

Cyrano interrupted him:

"Speak lower, foolish boy. You don't know whence this wind blows, nor whose head this hat adorns."

"Eh, *parbleu!* What's the difference! I know just one thing—my casket has been stolen, and I'm going to find it. Let all the winds of hell and all the hats in the world, including that of the Cardinal himself, try to stop me!"

"Bravo! There's a real speech!" applauded Saint-Amant. "Let's drink a little old Chinon. I propose the health of M. Bernard!"

The Cavalier gaily lifted his glass.

But Cyrano did not join them.

"Come!" cried the young man. "You're worried!"

"Eh, *sandious!* who wouldn't be! Give me twenty men to fight, a hundred, if you wish, even a thousand, armed with sharp swords and heavy clubs! We'll fight in the open air, underneath a fair sun, so that I can see where their blows are coming from and where mine land! But to fight in the darkness, against phantoms . . . brr!"

This was uttered in such an accent of terror, that the distressed Cavalier exclaimed:

"What, then we can't count on you?"

"Eh, stop there!" cried the Gascon, raising his head proudly. "What are you saying? Zounds! What do you think Cyrano de Bergerac is! When the fight comes, I'll be there at your side, and never give way an inch."

Greatly relieved, the others applauded. They had regained their fighting friend.

Now really aroused, the poet continued:

"He's a thief, after all, nothing but a common thief! If he has the trappings of a Cardinal, so much the worse for him!"

"We don't know anything yet," Saint-Amant tried to interrupt.

"Some day, I tell you, these phantoms will have to assume human shape,—and when we have before us men of flesh and bone, *sandious* . . . !"

The oath was whipped out like the blade of a sword.

"Mars, god of battle, just let me get my hands on them!" cried the Cavalier.

With a military gesture Saint-Amant supported his friend and showed with a snap of his fingers the small price he would give for this imaginary adversary.

A jovial madness seized the three comrades.

"My friends," resumed Cyrano, "I don't like political intrigues at all. It's a game in which the bravest man always loses. You seldom gain your fortune in it, and often lose your head. But for my friend I would go to the ends of the earth, and woe betide the man who gets in our way!"

Saint-Amant interrupted his friend's burst of oratory.

"Look!" he said with an air of pity.

For several minutes a poor devil had been standing near their table, looking enviously at the mass of bottles and plates.

"Why, it's Linières!" cried Cyrano.

"The poor fellow looks hungry," remarked the Cavalier, feeling sorry for this pale-looking man with an amazingly red nose.

"Ho! Linières!"

It was not necessary to speak twice to the famished man.

"Are you hungry, my good fellow?"

"A little," gasped Linières.

"And thirsty?"

The eyes of the poor wretch sparkled:

"Very!"

"Well, help yourself."

The thin body of Linières sank on the bench beside the gay cavaliers without at all discommoding them.

"Eat!" said Cyrano.

"And drink!" added Saint-Amant.

The pathetic drunkard had already started to fill his emaciated body with hunks of meat and large quantities of drink. Without paying more attention to their guest, the three friends resumed their conversation. Aroused by the heat of the wine and elated by their delightful meal, they made plans for turning Paris upside down until the Cavalier's casket was found.

Cyrano, quite recovered from his fears, became the most furious of the three. He offered to go at once and search the Cardinal's palace for the lost box. The Cavalier had great difficulty in dissuading him from this project.

The night advanced, the jugs were emptied, the belligerent valor of the drinkers increased.

"*Mildioux!*" swore Cyrano, pounding the table with his fist, "if only Saint-Amant discovers Bernard we'll settle the matter."

"We must be cautious," advised the young soldier.

Without once stopping his gastronomic exercises, Linières opened wide his eyes at this outburst. He assumed the duty of keeping the bottles from tipping over as Cyrano banged on the table. The poor fellow kept wondering who was the man whom these three fierce companions wished to seize.

"We must be careful," repeated the Cavalier with determination. "And above all, let's find where the wind comes from!"

Linières whispered to Saint-Amant:

"Who in the world is this discreet young man?"

The great reveller, whose face flamed with all the colors of hell, leaned over and said confidently:

"He's a famous nobleman in disguise!"

"Ah!"

"Take a good look at him! He has come to Paris to undo Monsieur the Cardinal."

The stupefied glutton nearly choked.

"And as he is a friend of Cyrano's and mine," continued Saint-Amant seriously, "we are lending him our swords . . ."

Linières had to take a large drink to cover up his extreme excitement.

"You expect to succeed—you three?" Saint-Amant looked at him with an air of offended dignity.

"Can you have the slightest doubt of it? And, besides, if we need a fourth man, we can count on you."

The wretched man nearly collapsed beneath the table. But Saint-Amant had not finished. He continued his mysterious remarks without in the least losing his serious manner:

"Since this young man has the honor to be our friend, I trust that, in his service, you will not hesitate to let yourself be cut into a thousand pieces . . ."

"Of c-c-course!" stammered Linières, with a scared, perplexed look on his face.

He now regarded his neighbors with terror. Cyrano continued to thunder his views, and the Cavalier kept recommending caution in such a voice as to make their poor guest's flesh creep.

At that minute Linières would not have given a penny for the Cardinal's skin.

CHAPTER XII

AN ILL WIND

It was striking midnight—a very late hour in those days—when the Cavalier arose from the table and bade his friends farewell.

The brave youth had, as might have been expected, a heavy head. Not that he had been overcome by the wine and feasting; in his soldier's life he had known many similar suppers. No! It was a different kind of drunkenness that he experienced. It came from a too rapid succession of events . . . too many people met . . . too many words spoken.

Words, words, words! His ears seemed deafened by them. The affected, subtle vocabulary of the Place Royale became jumbled in his head with the rough jokes of the tavern. It was all a twisted, confused mass without coherence.

And what a series of adventures! Pleasant and tragic, happy and sad, they had followed one upon another without leaving him time to breathe or straighten things out. What varied emotions! Never, even in the worst days of war, had he experienced so many sensations, some pleasant, some heartrending.

Two impressions dominated him. He was overjoyed at the feeling that his heart beat in unison with those of two noble friends. What friends! The fearless, romantic Cyrano; the wise, powerful Saint-Amant! And, above all, there was that new, sweet emotion which stirred the depths of his heart. Something tender and lovely, like the budding of a delicate flower.

Ah! dear, good Cyrano! dear, huge Saint-Amant! . . . Dear, pretty little Claire! And even dear drunken Linières, so quaintly pathetic with his thin, starved body! The Cavalier was almost charitable enough to include the thief. And why not? Had it not been the unknown man's action which had made these rare friendships possible?

With such thoughts in his mind, the young man had nearly fallen asleep at *The Pineapple.* Cyrano had offered to put him up for the night at his lodgings, on the Rue Grénetail, at *The White Sheep.* The crafty Saint-Amant had opposed this arrangement.

"Since fate has led the Cavalier to be mistaken for someone else, this coincidence, which produced such unfortunate results, may bring better luck later. In our predicament, we must try to profit by everything. So my advice is that our friend should return to his own lodgings."

This sage proposal met with general approval. Thus they had separated with affectionate farewells, after fixing on a meeting place for the next morning.

All this passed through the Cavalier's head as he hastened toward his bed. He left the Cité as expeditiously as he might, and reached the Maubertgate. Here he was more at home. He had only to pass the enclosure of the Carmelites, then climb the hill of the Montagne Sainte Geneviève, and he would be at the Collège de Navarre, and, opposite it, the house of Barbette. So he continued on his way, half asleep as he walked. The night was now dark, and he could see little.

He had just passed the Rue Judas, when he stopped quickly, awaking with a start. A dark form had jostled against him. He had been warned by his friends of the dangers in Paris at night. Grasping the hilt of his sword in one hand, and ready to draw instantly, ear and eye alert, he continued on his way.

There could have been no mistake. A muffled step followed his own.

"If it's a pickpocket," he muttered, "he'll get what he deserves."

Now the shadow passed him and without looking around walked on ahead. He saw it slip silently past his door.

"Well, here I am at home!" he said to himself. "Here's one day over, at least!"

He had already put his latch-key in the lock, when a voice, or rather an almost inaudible murmur, made him tremble:

"An ill wind blows tonight!"

The night was calm and peaceful. Not a breath of air. Yet he seemed to have heard a voice pronounce this warning. The Cavalier listened carefully. Nothing! Why, how stupid he was! He had been the victim of a hallucination. The disorder of his mind had materialized in this amazing way, and he was beginning to hear strange sounds. It was certainly time for him to get some sleep!

He was about to open the door, laughing at his mistake, when the same murmur caressed his ear. This time the voice said:

"I have news of M. Bernard."

"By my star," swore the Cavalier to himself, "I really heard something that time."

He quickly took a step in the direction from which the voice came. He restrained a cry of surprise. In the shadow, a man—the one who had passed him in the street—was looking at him intently, a finger on his lips to caution silence.

Suddenly the stranger turned around and, with his muffled step, crossed the street. The young man followed behind. He saw him turn to the left in front of the Collège de Navarre.

The thought crossed his mind that he was being led into an ambush. He stopped a moment.

"Pah! Let's see what he wants!"

Determined to be on his guard, however, he made sure that his blade was ready in its sheath. He then followed the mysterious man into the Place Clopin, a small area, enclosed on three sides. By the pale light of a lantern hung on the wall, he could discern a horse, saddled and bridled, tied to a ring.

The unknown awaited him near the horse. His face beamed with a pleasant smile, while he rubbed his hands with the greatest satisfaction.

At once the impetuous Cavalier opened the conversation:

"Monsieur, you spoke just now several words that arouse in me a desire to hear more. I hope that you will explain. . . ."

"Sh!" interrupted the stranger.

He pointed with his finger to the street which they had left, in which the Cavalier's house was situated.

"Yet . . ."

"Shhh . . . !" said the man again.

Then suddenly he murmured:

"You must not return to Barbette's. Everything is discovered. The house is guarded."

"By whom?"

"By the followers of the 'Red Man,' *parbleu!* I've been waiting for you here for two hours. I saw the archers of the Chatelet arrive, and His Eminence's guards."

"But who has told you to watch over me so carefully?"

"Who?" said the other, winking his eye slyly. "Ha, ha! You know well enough!"

The young man was on the point of answering that he knew nothing, but luckily he realized that this would be the one way never to learn anything about this mysterious affair. Obviously, he was taken for some one else, for some accomplice, so the best policy was to live up to the rôle.

"*Parbleu, yes!*" he answered, "I know who sends you here—(the devil I do!)—and I beg you to thank him on my behalf."

"You are profuse with your thanks . . . So they hadn't warned you that *there was an ill wind?*"

"They neglected that precaution."

"What stupidity! That's why I didn't find you at the other place?"

"Exactly!" said the Cavalier.

"Not seeing you I feared something had gone wrong, and immediately returned to her. It was she who sent me to guard you here."

The Cavalier understood less and less. However, he answered confidently:

"Oh, splendid! That was a marvellous idea."

"You're right! Just in time, too. You were walking straight into the trap."

"A close call!"

"A great catch for the Cardinal!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed the Cavalier. Then to himself he said:

"We can go on forever this way, but I'm not getting anywhere."

He decided to simulate haste.

"Let's lose no time," he said. "We must get to essential matters. Now, about . . . ah, M. Bernard. Didn't you say you had some news of him?"

"I did."

"Splendid! oh, yes, splendid! H'm . . . ha . . . h'm . . . And . . . the dear fellow's health is good?"

The other laughed:

"You certainly like to joke! If his health worries you, you'll soon be able to ask him about it."

"I'm going to see him, then?"

The stranger leaned against the horse, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, if not, would you and I be here? Take this," he added, drawing out from under his coat a sealed package, which he offered to the young man. "This is for him."

The Cavalier was straightforward and loyal. He hesitated to take this package which was put in his care with such misplaced confidence. For an instance he debated whether he should tell the rash messenger the truth.

"Then you don't come from M. Bernard?" he asked.

"Why, zounds! No, since you are the one who is supposed to deliver the message to him! Come, take it!"

The young man had had time to consider the matter. If through an exaggerated sense of honor he did not take advantage of this piece of luck, he would lose the trail of M. Bernard—which meant that of his casket as well.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" asked the other impatiently. "You seem to have your head in . . ."

"You're right! It's this ill wind, you see, that bothers me!"

The stranger laughed quietly, while the young man, having made up his mind, took the letter and put it in his pocket.

"Faith!" he thought, "I'll have my revenge when I give that to M. Bernard. It will be an opportunity to make his acquaintance."

But he did not know yet where to find this Bernard.

"Where shall I meet the man?" he asked.

"All the information is there. The Angel included a message to you."

"Well, well," said the Cavalier to himself, "I'm now in correspondence with angels!"

The other started to untie his horse.

"Take my advice, don't be late! Be on your way, and good luck!"

"Wait, *sapristi!* One more word. Where did this letter come from?"

"You know where!"

"Yes, of course, but who gave it to you?"

"The Angel!"

"I know, I know, but for whom did she do this?"

"For the Goddess, *parbleu!*" answered the stranger, one foot in the stirrup.

"Doubtless!—(What, on Olympus now!)—but . . ."

The young man was not able to finish his question. The stranger had jumped onto the saddle, and started off at full gallop down the hill. The Cavalier, completely disconcerted, started to rush after him, but suddenly stopped at the entrance to the street.

In front of him he had just seen the door of Barbette's house open. Apparently aroused by the noise of the galloping horse, several men appeared at the doorway.

One of them cried in a loud voice:

"Stop!"

The rider did not turn his head. On the contrary, spurring on his horse, he went off at full speed, leaning over the animal's neck. Suddenly there was a bright flash followed by a sharp explosion. The Cavalier stepped back a pace. He knew that sound, so familiar to his ear.

"So powder is speaking! Ha! This is more interesting!"

The noise of the horse's hoofs became faint. The rider must have descended the hill safely.

"Too far!" spoke a voice. "We've missed him."

"Bad luck!" replied another from within.

"Now," said the Cavalier to himself, "we're in for something! A real adventure at last!"

He felt a little dizzy, and, sitting down on a large stone, took off his hat. He was at the very end of the Place Clopin, which was dimly lit by the one lantern. Near by, a cock, aroused by the unaccustomed noise, began to crow.

The Cavalier thought over the recent events as well as his confused mind would permit.

"Since my star led me here, I have been taken for someone else—there's no doubt about that! Who is this other person? An accomplice of M. Bernard? Who is M. Bernard? A man who fears the wind! The wind? *Corbleu!* he's right! This *is* a dangerous wind—it blows in leaden clouds!"

He yawned.

"In the meantime, this is my lodging for the night—in the street! Alas, I won't finish the day in a comfortable bed. I think I deserved one."

He shook his head slowly, smiling.

"What an amazing world I seem to be in. Everything that's happened has been unusual. This morning

I was, theoretically, rich. This evening I was ruined. And here I am, apparently once more on the road to fortune."

He remembered the words of Cyrano, cursing the subtle intrigues of the Court.

"To fortune? or to the scaffold? Who knows? Well, we won't find out till it's all over! There can be no doubt that these people with whom my star has embroiled me, these persons lurking in shadows, are important personages. A Goddess! Zounds, that's not modest! And why does the Cardinal have such a paternal interest in the actions of a person just arrived in Paris?"

The calm, cool air of the night had once again cleared the Cavalier's mind.

"I'm beginning to feel that this M. Bernard is a most unusual person. Perhaps it will not be long before I find out. But what I don't understand is this 'Angel' affair. That intrigues me. I hate to believe it's all a coincidence. Some one must have stacked the cards for me, or put in a good word with my guardian angel. After all, didn't my mysterious friend say he had been sent by the Angel?"

A sudden thought interrupted this meditation.

"I almost forgot! He said that the Angel enclosed a message for me also. Let's have a look at it!"

So saying, the Cavalier took from his pocket the secret message, and began to examine it by the flickering light of the lantern. A pleasant smell of musk emanated from the mysterious packet.

"A woman's perfume," he said, greatly surprised.

The scented package was tied up with ribbons, which were attached to a little gold ring.

"A ring!"

Having untied the knot, he examined the ring.

"Let's see what the seal is—it looks like an engraved monogram. Curse that lantern, it's not worth a sou! Ah, an 'A' . . . An 'A'? That doesn't help me much. Let's look at the rest."

He put the ring in his pocket, and continued the examination. It did not take him long. There was only a heavy envelope, bearing a seal with the same initial 'A.' The inscription on the letter did not give much information to the Cavalier—it merely read: 'M. Bernard.' But a little piece of paper, folded over, slipped out from the package. It bore just two words, written in a woman's hand: 'To you'! Yet this message seemed to have something extraordinarily delicate and gracious about it.

"How charming is everything that a woman touches!" thought the headstrong youth. "There's a simple piece of paper, and yet it gives out a subtle perfume that goes to your head and intoxicates."

A sudden emotion made the paper shake in the youth's fingers.

"No!" he reflected, "that message can't come from an uninterested person. Why does my heart beat so?

"This paper comes from *her*. It has her perfume. That delicate, firm writing is hers! Those letters were traced by the lovely hand of my brave companion of the Pont Neuf, of my beautiful godmother. After all, what could be more appropriate than for her to have a celestial name: *The Angel!*

"Yes, it's my guardian Angel. She realized the danger I was in, and, pretending that I was her messenger, she sent this stranger to warn me. After all, what else am I? I offered her my sword; she calls upon it. She has entrusted me with this dangerous mission, she has confided her secret to my loyalty."

As we know, the Cavalier had a vivid imagination. It did not take him long to construct an entire romance. Then, suddenly, the thought flashed across his excited brain:

"What! She must know M. Bernard! *Vivadiou!* as Cyrano would say. I must read on and find out."

Bursting with eagerness, he unfolded the paper, and by the pale light of the lantern he made out these words:

55 *must avoid* 22. . .

The eager smile left the youth's face. His arms fell to his side in disappointment. He forced himself, however, to continue:

He will find 24 *at the appointed place and will lead him at the right hour, he knows where!*

This time it was too much. The young man burst out in an almost hysterical laugh of anger and defiance at that fate which seemed to be toying with him in such a shameless manner. This letter—this all-important letter—which came from Her, and was to lead him to Fortune, was nothing but an incomprehensible mixture of words and numbers. He laughed, and in his disappointment he almost wished he were choking instead.

"Well, my dear fellow," he said to himself, "the diabolical Bernard has escaped you. You won't win your fortune this day."

He shook the ridiculous letter with vexation.

"They write in this country just about as clearly as they talk. It's an education in itself to understand these people."

With a discouraged gesture he was about to throw away the unhappy document. Yet could he abandon to the night breeze this message, which, after all, had been confided to his discretion, to his honor?

"Oh, rubbish! Just a coincidence!"

Suddenly he uttered a sharp cry. On the back of the paper, he had just read these words—clear and neat; peremptory, imperious like a command; sweet like a prayer:

For the Mysterious Cavalier.

He had not been deceived; fate was not mocking him! This paper, originally destined for some other messenger who was to perform this service, was now inscribed to him.

As to its author—oh, the confidence of youth! There was not the slightest doubt in the young man's mind as to the identity of the anonymous correspondent.

Feverishly he read:

Be outside the wall of Saint-Jacques tonight at one o'clock. You are expected there.

Then, further on, he read:

The officer on guard at the gate will allow you to pass on showing the ring.

"At last! There's something I can understand," exclaimed the Cavalier gaily.

With a gesture of mad joy, he pressed the blessed piece of paper to his lips, then, without further reflection, started on his way. He ran quickly, guided only by instinct. He was expected!

As he passed in front of Saint-Jacques du Haut-Pas, the clock solemnly struck one. Now the young man no longer ran. . . . He had wings. He flew.

With his heart beating as if it would break, he arrived at his sacred rendezvous. The sound of the striking of the hour still vibrated in the air.

CHAPTER XIII

D'ARTAGNAN'S INSTRUCTIONS

THE simultaneous occurrence of events forces us to leave our hero for a moment, just as he has reached the Saint-Jacques gate. We must return to the Hôtel d'Aiguillon, where we left two important figurese: His Eminence, Cardinal Richelieu, and Monseigneur Giulio Mazarini.

Yet the reader may have perceived that in reality we are not so far from our friends when we are in the company of these great men as might be expected. Although both groups are ignorant of each other, there still seems to be some mysterious bond which connects them.

From the Saint-Jacques gate to the Petit-Luxembourg was a short distance. The road was flanked by many beautiful gardens, whose perfume was pleasant to inhale at this hour of the night. Among the most lovely of these gardens was that of the Convent of the Carmelites, where, as we know, Her Majesty, Anne of Austria, was making a retreat. Perhaps the point of contact between our various characters is to be found in the vicinity of these gardens.

So we return now to the house of the dearly-beloved niece of His Eminence—Madame de Combalet, Duchess of Aiguillon. The Cardinal's dark study is as we left it.

The powerful minister, whom the world thought sleeping in his sumptuous apartment in the Cardinal's Palace, was still there, watching over the State's safety—and his own. M. de Mazarin, his adviser, was still opposite him, in secret conference. However, the scene has changed somewhat. The older man has resumed his imperious manner, while the sly Italian, modest in his triumph, keeps himself in the background, as becomes a humble assistant.

Richelieu walked back and forth impatiently. He reflected; he laid his plans; while waiting for d'Artagnan to be brought in, he completed his arrangements for the immediate future.

From his corner, Mazarin spoke a word:

"Is Your Eminence sure of the man you have chosen—this M. d'Artagnan?"

The master replied dryly:

"He is the personification of loyalty!"

Mazarin remained silent, although making an imperceptible grimace. He was not particularly impressed by loyalty.

"However, you may see for yourself!"

At that moment the door opened quietly. Chavigny led in a man of middle height, of fine appearance and honest face.

"Monseigneur," said the assistant, "here is M. d'Artagnan."

The Musketeer entered with a calm air. Having saluted, he stood erect, motionless, a picture of the perfect soldier. None the less, the impassiveness of his bearing had not kept him from observing the salient details of the room.

Richelieu turned toward the Italian, as if to say: "Well, what do you think of him?" In the same mute manner Mazarin answered with an air of satisfaction: *"Peste!* There's a fine soldier!"

The fact is that at the age of thirty, the fearless Musketeer had attained that perfection of manliness of which his youth had given promise. He still had the same large, swarthy face of the Gascon youth. There was no longer the naïve air of the young Musketeer, of that dashing vigor of extreme youth which fades so swiftly. But through the passing of years his face had gained in regularity. The high cheek-bones and large, arched nose now gave the manly, martial touch that was needed to relieve the perfect beauty of the rest of his face.

His body had lost the slenderness characteristic of youth, without giving up any of its suppleness or grace. He was stronger with the increased strength of maturity. One thing alone had not changed: his piercing, fiery eyes—eyes that saw almost everything and guessed the rest. If, as is said, the eye is the mirror of the soul, then the soul of d'Artagnan was still the same. It would indeed be sad if it had changed.

So here he was! The Musketeer was as nobly generous and brave as before, only now there were added to these qualities prudence and reserve. He could give himself loyally to the cause and to the persons he served; but, even in moments of sacrifice, he preserved his cool, clear judgment, always considering the character of the cause and the persons he served! Devoted, loyal, but never duped!

In his most fatherly voice, the Cardinal began to address him.

"Come, M. d'Artagnan, approach a bit nearer. You haven't been mentioned in some time. What has become of you?"

"Alas, Monseigneur!" replied the Musketeer, "I do not become . . . , I remain . . ."

"Which means . . . ?"

"That I have remained lieūtenant of Musketeers, since the day ten years ago when Your Eminence was pleased to confer that rank on me."

"Is that a reproach, M. d'Artagnan?"

"Oh, Monseigneur! It is a mere statement of fact."

Mazarin smiled in his dark corner. This Gascon wit seemed familiar. It was closely related to his Italian cleverness.

Still in a benevolent manner, the Cardinal began again:

"You have good reason to complain. After the eminent services that you rendered, your devotion—as well as your discretion—have remained unrewarded."

At this double-edged compliment, the Musketeer showed no emotion. He knew what was in the mind of the prelate. Richelieu had never forgiven him for serving the Queen against him. He had taken him into his service so as to render him harmless. As for Anne of Austria, that poor princess had forgotten him, or, even if that were not true, what could she do for him?

"I myself," continued the prime minister, "have often regretted that I could not give you better employment. But what can one do? The days of heroism are gone. We are no longer young. Old quarrels are forgotten. A time of peace is hard on warlike natures like yours."

"The devil!" said the Gascon to himself. "What's he driving at? He doesn't bring me here in the middle of the night to have a pleasant chat!"

"Tell me, M. d'Artagnan, are you still the man you were?"

The question was embarrassing. The Musketeer scratched his ear, and then made this non-committal answer:

"What does Monseigneur imply?"

"That formerly you had hot blood . . ."

"Oh, I've calmed down! Particularly in regard to His Majesty's edicts against duelling."

"Oh, indeed!" said the Cardinal in a kindly tone. "It was a law that you paid little attention to in the old days—you and your friends. Do repeat their names to me."

"Athos . . ."

"Monsieur le Comte de la Fère—yes!"

"Porthos . . ."

"Monsieur du Vallon . . ."

"Aramis . . ."

"Le Chevalier d'Herblay. Yes, I remember."

And the minister smiled, as if calling to mind the pleasantest of memories.

"On my word," said d'Artagnan, emboldened by this apparent friendliness, "my poor friends would no longer recognize me. I am at this moment, by the faith of a Musketeer, as gentle as a lamb."

The Cardinal moved to his desk, and opened a large file. He passed through it rapidly, and then took out a sheet of paper at which he glanced for a moment. The Musketeer, watching him out of the corner of his eye, saw him smile as he read it.

"Tell me, M. d'Artagnan," asked the Cardinal in his sweetest tone, "what happened to that pleasant Swiss gentleman who lived in your lodgings?"

Astonished, the Gascon muttered to himself:

"Ah, I see now! It's that, then!"

The fatherly questioner continued:

"You apparently felt that he was paying too much attention to the hostess of your lodgings. It is written here that he was found one night in a gutter with the marks of a few sword-thrusts in his stomach. Had you heard about that?"

"Well, I do seem to . . . to remember . . ."

"The man died from the wounds . . ."

"Those Swiss are very fragile!"

"H'm! . . . And that guardsman of the King's who was picked up at the Carmes-Déchaux, rather the worse for wear, did you hear any mention made of him?"

"Oh, that's quite another matter, Monseigneur. The fool dared to pretend that in the service of Your Eminence swords rusted in their scabbards."

"He was given convincing proof to the contrary?"

"Could such an unparalleled calumny be tolerated, Monseigneur?"

"Well, we'll leave that. His Majesty's guardsmen are at times insolent. . . . But what do you think about those three dragoons whom some infuriated adversary transfixed, one after another, on the steps leading up to the Rue Saint-Honoré?"

In a tone of sincere commiseration, d'Artagnan answered:

"Poor devils!"

"It is insinuated here," the minister's finger was still running over the police report, "it is insinuated that this improvised executioner might be a certain Musketeer of our acquaintance . . ."

"Alas! Can this be true? One man, alone, against three?"

"Yes, so it is claimed."

"And do they also say there, Monseigneur, that a jealous rascal had hired these poor wretches treacherously to assassinate the Musketeer?"

"Wait! They do speak of a man who was found half undressed, pierced on another step. It might be that one."

But d'Artagnan pretended to understand nothing. He continued:

"Do they add that this Musketeer would have perished except for the repentance of one of the accomplices, who warned him of the danger? And that, except for this, he would not be here now in front of Your Eminence, ready to die in your service?"

"Oh, it was you then, M. d'Artagnan?"

The Musketeer bit his lips, and bowed his head. To appreciate this scene to the full, we must picture the attitude of the two speakers. The Cardinal, at first kind and fatherly, passed gradually to seriousness and then to severity. The Musketeer followed an opposite evolution, slowly losing his effective self-confidence, and becoming more and more embarrassed. Mazarin, an impartial spectator in his little corner, followed the dialogue with great amusement.

The lieutenant now felt himself lost. He had no doubt that his enemy wished to be rid of him, for some unknown reason. But the Musketeer's conscience was not, after all, completely clear.

Feeling the man at his mercy, Richelieu was ready for the last blow.

"They also mention—the list is long, as you can see . . ."

"Must we continue?" groaned d'Artagnan, who would have preferred to end everything at once.

"Oh, well, they say . . ."

"They say so many things!"

"That on coming out of the tavern of *The Sphere* in the centre of Marais, a Musketeer—always these Musketeers!—drew his sword in broad daylight against two men: a great nobleman and a poet. They add that he inflicted telling punishment on these persons, striking one with the point of his blade, the other with the edge . . ."

"It was deserved!" interrupted d'Artagnan, determined to end the scene. "The poet had written some frightful verse which the great nobleman did wrong in paying for as if it had been excellent."

"H'm!" said the other. "Wasn't the real reason because they spoke ill of a person who is dear to you, lieutenant?"

"Yes, indeed, Monseigneur! They insulted a woman."

"Wasn't it Her Maj . . ."

"It was a woman!" interrupted d'Artagnan firmly.

"At any rate, you regret your action?"

"Yes, sincerely, Your Eminence! I regret that I used the point of the sword. The edge would have been sufficient."

The Cardinal scowled.

"M. d'Artagnan, are you still incorrigible?"

"Alas, Monseigneur, I begin to fear so!"

The Gascon felt shivers go down his back as he met the stern glance of his adversary. But, playing his last card, he said boldly:

"Unless Your Eminence helps me. It is really all your fault . . ."

He knew that this remark had gone home. In spite of himself, a faint smile lightened the Cardinal's face. He followed up his advantage:

"You see, Monseigneur, the cause of these repeated . . . misfortunes, is too much leisure. My Gascon blood keeps boiling over, and, *parbleu!* It is constantly playing these tricks on me! There is, however, one way to keep it from wasting itself on trivial things . . ."

"What, then?"

"To employ it in great things, in the service of Your Eminence—that is, for the good of the State."

The Cardinal was by no means insensible to flattery.

It was one of the few weaknesses of this great man. The scowl left his face.

"Come," he thought. "Here's just the man I need."

Then, aloud, he said:

"So be it! I shall test your loyalty. I desire to see if he who has shown himself so faithful to other protectors will serve me faithfully in turn."

The Musketeer quickly extended his hand.

"You would wrong me if you had the slightest doubt of this. Her Majesty put me at the disposition of Your Eminence. From that day my life has been yours."

Richelieu exchanged a quick glance with Mazarin. D'Artagnan noticed it, and continued:

"Day and night, in France or without the kingdom, wherever it shall please Your Eminence to use me, you will find me a devoted and loyal servant."

"Well spoken!" said the Cardinal with satisfaction. "For the moment, your orders are simple. You must only show a little patience. You know the Convent of the Carmelites?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"You are aware that from the Rue d'Enfer to the Rue Saint-Jacques, the walls of the gardens are skirted by a narrow, dark street?"

"The Rue de la Bourbe!"

"Half-way between the two streets there is a little door . . ."

The lieutenant nodded.

"Very good! You are to go there alone, and watch the door in question with the utmost care."

Mazarin agreed with a nod of his head.

"Rest assured, Monseigneur," said the Musketeer, "not a person will pass through that gate while I am there."

The Italian made a gesture of impatience. The Cardinal hastened to add:

"Heavens! What ardor! On the contrary you are to allow any one to enter who so desires."

"Just so! I see that my duty is to keep any one from leaving. Your Eminence may rest easy on that score. No one shall leave without my seizing him."

Again Mazarin showed signs of restlessness.

"Please restrain yourself, M. d'Artagnan, you are in too great a hurry. It is quite the opposite service that we desire. I desire," continued Richelieu, correcting himself. "I desire that there shall be no violence, no uproar."

The Musketeer began to be mystified.

"Listen to me carefully! Your mission is to attach yourself to a certain gentleman, who will be more clearly pointed out, and not to leave him, no matter what may happen."

The Gascon made a wry face. He was only half-pleased with his rôle, and would have refused it if the Cardinal had not taken the trouble beforehand to show him that he was at his mercy. So there was nothing to do but make the best of the situation.

The prime minister, in the meantime, had been consulting in a low voice with Mazarin. Consequently he did not see the Musketeer's look of displeasure, and when he turned to him again, the Gascon had resumed his faultless military bearing.

"Monsieur de Mazarin will explain the rest on the way."

"I shall be at hand," said the counsellor humbly, "to communicate at the proper time to M. d'Artagnan Your Eminence's orders."

D'Artagnan looked at the insinuating figure of the Italian, and his lip curled slightly. He hid this movement by abruptly turning around.

"One moment," said the Cardinal. "As this business is likely to lead you some distance away, you may need money. Perhaps you have none?"

This time the lieutenant smiled.

"'Perhaps' is unnecessary!"

Richelieu started to take a purse from a drawer in the desk. Mazarin instinctively stepped forward.

"It is not necessary, Monseigneur," he said in a low voice.

"Oh, yes! Here, take it, M. d'Artagnan."

Mazarin sighed. The generosity of the statesman amazed him. The Musketeer, strengthened by this substantial reinforcement, had assumed his most contented air.

"Do not forget: my desire is that there shall be no noise. It is important that no one know that the person you are to 'accompany' has entered the convent. What happens afterward must also remain a secret."

"Your Eminence was kind enough to praise my discretion."

"Discretion is not enough! It is possible that the gentleman will be accompanied by several friends."

The Musketeer made a motion as if about to seize his sword, and said carelessly:

"The number makes no difference!"

"Remember," said the Cardinal, laughing, "you are expressly forbidden to fight."

"And yet if I am attacked?"

"You won't be attacked there, because they will have no more desire to make a noise than you."

"Then what does Your Eminence fear?"

"Oh, you never can tell. You might be recognized. Then, knowing that M. d'Artagnan is very partial to the sword, they might like to entice you away from the street under some pretext or other."

"Oh, Monseigneur!" protested d'Artagnan. "I am cautious!"

"H'm!" muttered the minister, knowing well the man with whom he was dealing.

Suddenly Mazarin approached the minister in his bland manner.

"There is one way, Monseigneur."

"The devil!" thought the Musketeer. "What is this little Italian up to?"

The counsellor continued sweetly:

"Let Monsieur d'Artagnan give to Your Eminence his word as a gentleman, as a Musketeer, that, come what may, *he will not draw his sword from the scabbard.*"

The look of the Gascon should have withered the Italian. The latter turned to the Cardinal, and said with a look of supplication:

"Monseigneur?"

"You're right," decided Richelieu. "It's a sure guarantee. Swear, then, M. d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan had had time to collect himself.

"It is enough that Your Eminence commands it!"

"Come," said Richelieu, suddenly softening, "is it really so difficult? M. de Mazarin will say the words, you repeat them after him."

"I swear . . ." began Mazarin.

"I swear . . ." repeated d'Artagnan reluctantly.

"On my faith as a gentleman . . ."

"On my faith as a gentleman . . ."

"And as a Musketeer . . ."

The words stuck in the throat of the poor Gascon.

"And as a Musketeer . . ."

"That come what may . . ."

"That come what may . . ."

"I will not draw my sword from its scabbard this night."

The miserable Musketeer made a desperate effort, and then suddenly, as if he were swallowing a bitter pill, repeated:

"I will not draw my sword from its scabbard this night."

Mazarin smiled triumphantly.

"Alas!" sighed d'Artagnan.

With a military salute, the lieutenant of Muskeeters, covered with perspiration, left the room. The Cardinal and his accomplice rubbed their hands with an air of complete satisfaction.

CHAPTER XIV

MONSIEUR BERNARD

ONE may imagine the confused ideas and feelings with which the Mysterious Cavalier arrived at Saint-Jacques. All question of repose, of sleep, had disappeared as soon as he read the message of his lovely godmother.

So he rushed on with all the ardor of his youth. Whither? He did not know exactly. But straight ahead. He repeated his motto: "Carry on to the finish!" A sweet but imperious voice kept ringing in his ear: "Carry on, Cavalier, to M. Bernard, lead him to where the Goddess waits!" The faithful, obedient messenger had little interest in knowing who this Goddess and this Bernard were. They were friends of the Angel—that was enough! The Cavalier did not give a thought to the ominous circumstances of his adventure, to the dangers of the road, to unknown traps. The Angel had commanded. Like Orpheus, he would have gone through hell for her, if necessary. Nay, more, he even felt reconciled to the idea of assisting the mysterious M. Bernard. For our young hero had now completely forgotten that an hour before he was raging at this same person; that he had accused him of being the author of all his misfortunes, the thief of the casket.

In this great state of exuberance he passed the Port-Royale, and the walls of the city. In front of him extended fields lost in shadow. The only landmark was a peasant's hut in the distance.

As he advanced, Tancrède thought he saw figures ahead of him. Two men were there, standing near horses. One of them was apparently a servant, to judge from his dress and manner. The other kept in front, walking back and forth impatiently, anxiously peering into the darkness.

The young soldier did not have a moment's hesitation. Without ever having seen him, *he recognized M. Bernard.* On his approach, the impatient gentleman walked several steps forward.

"At last!" sighed the Cavalier, "I'm through with ghosts and phantoms. The mysterious unknown is there, in front of me, in flesh and blood. I shall see his face, hear his voice."

With this reflection, he took off his hat, and said in a low voice:

"Monsieur Bernard?"

The other nodded his head in acquiescence.

"I am the messenger of the Angel," continued the Cavalier.

Without opening his lips, M. Bernard indicated that he understood. With the end of his finger he touched the scarf that the young man wore, and which Mlle. de Cernay had given him.

"Good!" exclaimed the young man to himself, "he recognizes my colors. The proof is here! The Angel and my lovely godmother are one and the same charming person."

And, continuing his part, he added:

"I am ready to accompany you to where the Goddess awaits."

The other nodded his head in a rather impatient manner, and then made a sign for him to put a ring on his finger.

"Oh, the devil!" thought the Cavalier, suddenly disturbed, "is M. Bernard voiceless?"

The eyes of the stranger demanded authoritatively an answer.

"Yes, yes," said the young man, "I have the ring."

He took out of his pocket the ring which the horseman had given him in the square. M. Bernard seemed satisfied as the young man handed it to him and made a gesture which clearly signified: "Let us go!"

"Well, well!" groaned Tancrède in some vexation, "I see we're destined to have a lively conversation!"

Without another word he started toward the wall, followed by his silent companion. A soldier of the municipal guard was on duty at the gate. He made a sign to the two men to stop.

"On the King's service," announced the Cavalier firmly. "Call your commanding officer."

The latter finally appeared in very bad humor at the door of the sentry house, but as soon as he saw the ring, he took off his hat, and ordered:

"Let them pass!"

Thus the young man and his loquacious comrade entered the Faubourg Saint-Jacques. M. Bernard had not spoken a word, and he no longer bothered to carry on his dumb-show. Enveloped in his greatcoat which completely hid his body and half of his face, he had paid little attention to what was happening. Now he advanced, silent and aloof.

The young man, of course, had to let himself be directed by his companion, as he had no idea where he was supposed to go. M. Bernard, however, appeared to know the map of the region by heart, and walked with a sure step along the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Jacques, which was completely deserted and asleep.

The Cavalier took advantage of the dim light of the cloudy sky, and the occasional flare of street lights, to examine his companion more closely. From what he could see he appeared to be handsome and of great elegance of manner, in spite of his dust-covered clothes, which testified to long riding. His age might be thirty, in spite of a rather fragile body, which made him look older. The young soldier wished he had been more manly, more vigorous.

"Well," he thought, "it's as Cyrano said. The men of today affect this feminine manner. I suspect, however, that, in spite of his bearing, this gentleman is brave and daring."

The face, which the Cavalier examined, was beardless, and framed in a great mass of curls. It bore an expression of supreme grace, and yet there was a certain softness which restrained one from complete admiration. It was not the face of a man of action; the complexion was too delicate, the features too spare. However, the total effect was one of nobility and perfect harmony.

Observing him more closely, the Cavalier received a shock. He felt that this person was not unknown to him. And yet he was certain that this was the first time he had seen the gentleman! But the more closely he examined, the more this impression grew. He *had* seen those soft eyes, with their quick, penetrating glance; that delicate mouth; those finely moulded lips which gave to his smile a tender yet firm expression.

Come! Could there be any doubt? It was the penetrating look, the charming smile which had already cast their spell upon him! That look, that smile, *parbleu!* they were those of his adorable godmother! So the enigmatic M. Bernard, the fugitive M. Bernard, resembled Mlle. de Cernay!

Having reached this conclusion, the Cavalier felt ready, if necessary, to shed his blood gladly, on one word from his companion. On one word? Yes, but M. Bernard was voiceless!

"What a pity!" thought the Cavalier. "I should like to hear his voice. If it has the same caressing tone as that of my godmother, the enchantment will be complete!"

He had no time to continue these observations. Having looked behind rapidly to see that they were not followed, the handsome gentleman suddenly turned to the left into a little street, flanked by high walls. The Cavalier could see nothing. The night was dark, and the pale light that filtered through the clouds was cut off by the dome-like foliage of the trees.

He followed his companion as best he could. Midway down the street he suddenly stopped. There was a clear, shrill whistle, followed by a slight creaking, as if a door were opening. At the same time the Cavalier saw an opening in the wall, through which was visible the dim silhouette of a garden, filled with trees and deep foliage. The smell of fresh earth and the perfume of flowers came to him.

But this was only a quick flash. An instant later the door closed in the same silent manner. The Cavalier found himself alone in the street. On making this discovery, his first reaction was one of extreme vexation. He was being treated in too off-hand a fashion. To leave him there in front of this mysterious wall, without a word of thanks, without a gesture of farewell, *morbleu!* . . . To make him associate with a stranger, with a person who was silent through caution—that was understandable. But it was really too much to attach him to an automaton.

"Good night, my friends; farewell!" murmured the soldier. "I'm off to see if Cyrano is still at *The Pineapple.* We can go together to the Rue Grénetail for some sleep. That's a better idea than to continue this game of hide-and-seek with ghosts as partners!"

A sudden idea stopped him:

"Not too quickly, young man. What if the Angel should make her appearance! This is certainly the right moment, by my star, for I'm completely bewildered."

He began to resume his usual gaiety:

"Faith, this situation is amusing! Ever since my casket was stolen I've been groping in shadows, having just one light to guide me in the darkness—M. Bernard! Finally my star put me face to face with him. At last I was to speak to him, to touch him. The mystery was to be solved. *Mordieu!* Everything on the contrary is becoming more involved. M. Bernard is voiceless . . . and looks like my sweet godmother. That, at least, is something to be said for him! I wonder if he is really dumb? H'm! No, that's not likely."

Comforted by this reflection, he concluded:

"Let's stay for the next act. However, I should like to know where I am. There is a gate in this wall, and behind that gate is a garden. I know that much. But it's not enough to distinguish the place by.

"Suppose we work this out. We followed the Faubourg Saint-Jacques from the Port-Royale. Then we turned to the left in front of a fountain. Perhaps I can find the name of the street somewhere."

So saying, the young man turned around, and, counting his steps so that he could find his way back again, he walked to the corner of the street. A flickering oil lamp burned in front of the shrine of a saint. By this dim light the Cavalier could just make out an inscription, engraved on the stone:

"Rue . . . de . . . la . . . Bourbe!"

He looked around him to examine his surroundings. On every side there were high buildings surmounted by crosses. Here and there the spire of a chapel emerged. In front of him, almost hidden in the darkness, was the graceful dome of a church. He re-entered the little street and walked from one end of it to the other, still counting his steps. At the other end was the Rue d'Enfer.

"Good!" he said to himself, as he returned to his post. "It's all straightened out now. I'm on the Rue de la Bourbe, between the Faubourg Saint-Jacques and the Rue d'Enfer. Around me are the grounds of five or six monasteries. The spot where M. Bernard so mysteriously disappeared is a cloister. Which one? The Chartreux, the Feuillantines, or it might even be the Carmelites! So much I know."

"The devil take it!" he said to himself gaily, "there's something rather amusing about this. A handsome cavalier communes with a Goddess, at night, in a convent! I only hope it's not some political intrigue!"

At that moment he again heard the creaking of the door, and a soft blast of wind charged with perfume caressed him. Suddenly a thin shadow, enveloped in a monk's cowl, slipped through the opening.

Near the ear of the young man, a soft voice called:

"Cavalier, are you there?"

What joy! Here was something that made up for his suffering, his discomfort, his waiting. This sweet, melodious sound which floated toward him like a murmur, was the incomparable voice of his Angel, Mlle. Claire de Cernay! The Angel had made her much desired appearance.

The young man turned around quickly. In fact, so quickly that he bumped into this shadow, and was forced to catch it to prevent it from falling.

"Oh," she said laughing, "it *is* you! I recognize you from your abruptness."

"Pardon my clumsiness," stammered the Cavalier, enchanted and confused.

He felt her press his hand, very softly, and this reply was ample. After a moment's silence in which they tried to recognize one another in the dark, Claire said:

"Thank you, Cavalier! You were faithful to your promise, and answered my first call."

"It is I, Mademoiselle, who should thank you. Except for your forethought, I should have walked straight into Barbette's, and been caught in that trap."

He felt her shiver, as she asked:

"They returned, didn't they?"

" 'Faith, yes, and in large numbers, as far as I could determine."

"Good heavens!" she murmured, "what danger he was in!"

This sentence might apply to M. Bernard as well as to our young Cavalier. But the latter did not hesitate to accept its most agreeable implication, and he pressed the little hand he held, as if in thanks.

"The fact is that, without a certain Angel who watches so carefully over foolish young men, it would have been the end of me. I was in no mood to fall into such a trap, and those gentlemen seemed to be a bit rough in their tactics!"

"Oh, they would have taken you alive, be sure of that!

The man who sent them is always anxious to speak to his adversaries."

"Who then is this formidable, obscure master?"

She shivered.

"Silence!"

"I heard somebody mention the name of the Cardinal . . ."

"Softly, for pity's sake! You would like to know who those men were? Rather, wish never to have to find out."

"Nevertheless, I'd like to know a bit more about it! For, after all, here I am struggling with adversaries who are completely unknown to me. . . .."

"The truth is, it wasn't you they were looking for at all."

"I know," interrupted the Cavalier in a tone of slight impatience, "it was the eternal M. Bernard!"

"Yes, it was he," replied the girl with a certain hesitation. "And, yet, there is one thing I can't understand. They knew perfectly well that he had left Barbette's."

"Well, perhaps in looking for M. Bernard they found something else."

"What?"

"Oh, some lost object, some clue, a casket, for instance. Perhaps such a discovery interested them, and, holding the object, they returned in order to hold the owner as well."

"You speak in riddles."

"Each in his turn," said the young man, mischievously. "I will explain this to you another time at length. But I am certain that this time those kind gentlemen were waiting for me. They have already played a wretched trick on me."

"Then," cried Claire gaily, "if I understand you correctly, our enemies must be yours."

"I'm beginning to think so."

"Oh, how fortunate! I almost hesitated to employ you against them."

In an impassioned voice, the Cavalier protested:

"Do you think I would not have served you and your friends with the same zeal, no matter who threatened you? It is not necessary that our enemies be the same for my devotion to be the same!"

"Well, anyway, I'm glad. I'll have no qualms now about using your assistance."

"It is yours, you well know! I offered to serve you, voluntarily, without any reservations. Did you not call me your champion?"

Overwhelmed by the warmth of this protest, she remained silent.

"I am a soldier," he continued, "and can only offer you my sword. But I offer it to you with all my heart."

"And with all my heart I accept it!" she said with frank confidence.

"Oh, thank heaven! Since the agreement is signed, mademoiselle, allow your obedient servant to ask one favor. I realize that I am engaged in a serious affair. I already have enemies—that could not be avoided; and friends, for which I am extremely grateful. Well, I should like to know the names of my adversaries. It seems to me that I should fight better if I knew them."

"Cavalier, it is not enough to be brave. You must be discreet."

"I am sufficiently discreet for you to trust me. Tell me, at least, who is this Goddess whom we both serve?"

"You will soon know."

"And this M. Bernard?"

"He fascinates you," said Claire, amused.

"Do understand me. If I question you in this manner, it is not out of idle curiosity. As I have said, I have my secret, which I shall soon confide to you. Well, by a strange coincidence, M. Bernard has entered into my affairs. Without realizing it, doubtless, he is the cause of a grave misfortune which has befallen me. So I have, you see, a vital interest in discovering what person is hidden beneath this borrowed name."

The eloquent tone of this request struck the young girl.

"You will have plenty of time to question him yourself," she said.

"He's not voiceless then?"

Mlle. de Cernay's silvery laugh answered this question.

"Voiceless! What an idea!"

"Well, I really didn't think so. But when may I question him?"

"This very night."

"I am to see him again?"

"You are to be his companion."

"Where am I to take him this time?"

"Away from Paris—far from here."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Cavalier, disappointed.

"Does my champion hesitate?"

"No, certainly not, but in leaving Paris . . ."

"Yes?"

"I leave all that is dear to me."

She pretended to misunderstand the meaning of this blunt remark.

"Is there some important business that retains you here?"

"There is nothing more important to me than to serve you."

"Well?"

"I shall obey."

"Believe me," she said, "it is better thus. You know that you are being searched for. Why, I don't know. Doubtless our common enemy would like to capture you. You must put yourself out of his reach."

"You are right, and again I thank you."

"Come, it is time to separate."

"Already!"

"We have remained here too long as it is."

"No one can see or hear us."

"One can never be sure."

"But where shall I find M. Bernard?"

"Here, in two hours. When you hear the Val de Grâce strike four o'clock, be in this same place. Take care, above all, not to be noticed or followed. It is also necessary that the road be clear at four o'clock."

"I understand. The road will be clear."

"No rashness! Farewell!"

He held her a moment longer, and said in a beseeching tone of voice:

"Tell me, will my exile be long?"

"A few weeks. Time enough for them to forget you."

"And when I return, shall I see you again?"

The young man's sincerity had won her over.

"Yes!" she said softly.

"Then, no matter how great the danger of this mission, no matter how terrible the perils of the road, rest assured that I shall return!"

To hide her emotion, she quickly turned away. The dainty shadow slipped silently through the open door. The Cavalier thought he saw her turn and give him a last look with her beautiful, soft eyes.

CHAPTER XV

THE CARMELITES OF THE RUE SAINT-JACQUES

DEEPLY moved, Tancrède watched Claire disappear. Safely enveloped by the dark night, he threw after her a farewell kiss.

"*Morbleu,* Cavalier!" said the young man to himself, as soon as the door was closed, "how very clear everything is now! You don't yet know about M. Bernard, nor the Goddess, nor . . . the wind! You're a thousand miles from your casket. Well, what difference? You at least know who the Angel is, and that makes up for everything!

"Yes, by your star, you're playing a pretty little game in which you may lose your head. But it won't be so bad, now—you have something that makes giving it up worth while."

Then, faithful to the promise he had made his godmother, the Cavalier started to leave the little street and turned toward the Rue d'Enfer.

At that moment a door opened on the opposite side, in the wall of the grounds of the Carthusian monastery. Two men came through the door.

On seeing them, the young soldier quickly withdrew into an angle. Dressed in greatcoats, the two walkers passed by, nearly brushing against him.

"Prudence, my dear sir, prudence!" counselled one of them with a honied voice.

"Very well!" groaned the deep voice of the second. "I have not yet forgotten my orders!"

The Cavalier caught nothing more, but he had heard enough to put him on his guard. From his hiding-place, he listened to the sound of the retreating steps. Suddenly all was quiet.

"They must have turned into the Rue de la Bourbe," he said with some alarm.

He peered out. The two had stopped at the entrance to the side-street.

"Ah, ha!" he said to himself, "the Angel was right. There is no such thing as safety here."

The strangers separated.

"Above all, keep your sword in its scabbard."

The words did not reach the young man's ear, but he understood the gesture.

"The devil! It looks as if this street would not be altogether deserted tonight."

The solemn bell of Val de Grâce struck two.

"Good!" muttered the Cavalier, "we've still two hours ahead of us."

Looking behind him with distrust, he said:

"It seems to me that this is the moment to go for Cyrano."

While our two young friends had been profiting by the darkness of the night to say so many things in so few words, there was an entirely different scene in the garden, from which they were separated by a wall only.

On a stone bench, overtopped by a large lilac bush, a gentleman and a lady were clasped in close embrace. In the gentleman our young friend would have been able to recognize his silent and enigmatic companion, M. Bernard. Relieved of his heavy coat, he appeared in the full brilliance of his attire. His elegant travelling habit set off perfectly the fine outline of his figure. His feminine manner which the Cavalier had noticed was now more strongly accentuated.

In his arms, her head against his shoulder, was a woman. A woman? No, such was her radiant beauty that she would be better described as a goddess. She was clad in a penitential dress which merely increased her beauty. A lovely, fair creature, her perfectly moulded body possessed full and harmonious lines. Under the fold of her robe could be seen adorable arms. Her hands, with their aristocratic grace and dazzling whiteness, seemed made for benediction and for command. The hands of a madonna, of a queen in front of whom one should kneel in reverence.

Yet, goddess, madonna, or queen, this woman wept. Tears poured from her celestial eyes and like pearls streamed down her cheeks. With a movement of affection and consolation, the gentleman took out a fine, lace handkerchief and tried to stop this flow.

He spoke, in a voice ringing and sweet:

"Oh, I beg of you, my Sovereign, my Queen, be courageous."

"Oh, no, no!" moaned sadly the divine penitent, "this is too much. Too long have I held back these tears. Let them flow for this one moment of freedom, while I am alone with you, as in the old days. I have so much to weep for."

"Poor beloved!"

"Yes, so many, many things! My lost youth! That youth which you recall, and which has slipped away, useless, without leaving a single consoling recollection."

The cavalier sighed sadly, as the lady continued:

"My present life—emptier still. My lonely, dreary life!"

"Does it always weary you?"

"Weary me? That is too mild a word."

"He still suspects you? He torments you with that horrible jealousy?"

"Even worse than that."

"He hates you?"

"Alas, he shows me not even that kindness. He scorns me."

"Scorns *you!* You, who were born to be loved, and served on bended knee!"

"Oh, you have no idea what frightful torture it is for a woman to be despised. To feel that she is as something dead to the man to whom she is bound!"

"I thought he was becoming reconciled."

"In appearance, only! I feel him always indifferent, hostile. When he returns to me after the hunt, my heart sinks, as if at the approach of some disaster. He scarcely deigns to notice my presence. Sometimes he glances at me, coldly."

"Poor man! How they have dried up his heart, turned him from all human affections. . . ."

"Such is my life! That is the misery I suffer—I, in the sight of all the world. . . ."

The gentleman sank to his knees in front of the unhappy woman, his eyes lighted with compassion. In a soft, musical voice he said:

"Oh, my dearly beloved mistress, my precious sovereign, how I grieve for you! To have left you so gay, so full of hope. And now to see you again after sixteen years of separation, crushed with sorrow and misery, disheartened and mortally sad."

The beautiful lady broke away from the embrace in which her companion held her so fervently.

"Let us leave that," she said. "We have talked too much of me and my misery.

"But you, what a terrible risk you are running in coming here, in leaving your exile! Since you have set foot on this soil, so full of traps and ambushes, I have been living in mortal terror of some disastrous misfortune. If they should suspect your presence, if they should guess who was hiding under that borrowed name . . . Alas, I tremble for you, as much as for myself!"

"I had to see you, you know. The reasons were too weighty for me to hesitate before any danger. Did you not realize this in granting me an interview?"

"Yes, I granted it to you because I knew you would overcome the impossible to see me; because I feared even worse madness from your rash soul. I granted it to you to beg you to depart without delay, to risk no longer your life and liberty—and perhaps, also, my safety and honor!"

The gentleman stood up. With a look of wonder he shook his head:

"So they have not forgotten me—after sixteen years!"

"No, they have not forgotten you, neither master nor servant. You are for them the living incarnation of the past."

A sudden, sarcastic smile came upon the lips of the gentleman.

"They are right," he cried in a defiant tone, "nor have I forgotten them."

The penitent shuddered. Her companion stood before her, in a menacing attitude. His pretty, half-womanish face had suddenly assumed a strange fierceness. In this pose, he looked like some rebel or fallen angel, to which, indeed, his fatal beauty bore a resemblance.

In a voice of suppressed fury he continued:

"Yes, yes! I remember! All those whom I loved, they crushed cruelly, without pity. The finest and bravest gentlemen, the flower of France's nobility snuffed out!

"All of my friends, Chalais, Boutteville, de Marillac, Montmorency, have shed their precious blood on the scaffold.

"Me they have exiled, banished, hunted down like a criminal. But, at least, they have not crushed me! From the depth of my exile, I remain fighting against their impotent fury."

"Silence, for pity's sake! Your anger terrifies me."

"For sixteen years they have tracked me and hunted me! For sixteen years I have led my wandering life, hunted from city to city, from country to country, from court to court. . . ."

"Oh, I implore you . . . !"

"Sixteen years of suffering for one unpardonable crime: I loved you!"

"It is true, and yet when they hunt you, they are striking at me."

"It makes no difference! They have not broken my resistance. For sixteen years, wherever their cruel vengeance has driven me, I have sown hatred and revenge! They exiled me to Spain, and I turned upon them a colossus, Olivarès! In Lorraine the Duke Charles has become a more faithful subject of mine than of theirs! In Flanders, the archduchess is with me, as well as her generals—Lamboy and Metternich! In England I control King Charles through my friends, Montague and Holland! That is my work!

"They don't forget me? So be it! I also remember!"

The distressed penitent, alarmed by this anger, murmured:

"Is it you who talk so?"

"They desired it!" continued the gentleman violently. "They showed no mercy to me or to my friends. They must expect no mercy from me. The hour of expiation has arrived. At last I rise from the tomb in which they believe me buried. I, the witness of their shedding of blood, stand before them in accusation! I, a survivor of so many victims, cry for vengeance! Upon the triumphant, victorious murderer, I call down the wrath of men and the justice of God!"

With a movement of sovereign nobility, the lady in her turn stood up. She stretched forth her imperious hands, crying:

"Silence! silence! You forget before whom you speak —and who you are!"

The rebel archangel smiled proudly, and, with a calm even more terrifying than her previous anger, said:

"No, I forget not! I know that I speak to Her Majesty, Anne of Austria, Infanta of Spain, and Queen of France."

The sudden emotion of the Queen was stilled. Her arms dropped to her side, and she sat down again on the stone bench. The proud cavalier approached her, and added in a low voice:

"I also remember who I am. An almost insignificant person, perhaps. A poor being, alone and weak, an adventurer who no longer has rank, family, or country—an exile, banished, wandering. But I should remember above all that in my veins is the blood of the Rohans, the royal blood of Brittany, and that I wear the ducal crown of the Princes of Lorraine.

"Who am I? . . . At an hour when *men* bow before the triumphant murderer, it is necessary that women rise and act. No, Your Majesty, I do not forget that I am only a woman! But that woman is called Marie de Rohan-Monbazon, Duchess of Chevreuse!"

Ah, if our Cavalier could have heard this answer, what amazement would have been his! But this was not likely to happen, as at that moment he was outside in the little street, quite fully occupied with Mlle. de Cernay.

The name of Marie de Rohan, uttered in a loud voice, made the Queen tremble. She looked about her in a frightened manner.

"For mercy's sake," she begged, "be careful."

The Duchess of Chevreuse continued in a voice of inflexible determination.

"Understand me clearly, my Queen, my friend! Nothing can deter me from the enterprise I have undertaken. Now less than ever before. These sixteen years of secret toil, of constant undermining, are about to bear fruit. That is why I am here in your presence."

"What do you wish of me, then?" asked Anne, alarmed.

Coldly, Mme. de Chevreuse replied:

"Your support!"

"No, no! I wish to hear nothing more."

"My Queen, listen to me. All those who died in the service of your cause, Madame, I am avenging. I am freeing you from the yoke of humiliation which weighs on your shoulders."

"Too much blood has been shed for me, too many sterile devotions have brought only death! I desire nothing more. My humiliation, my misery, I accept them as a punishment. I offer them to God as marks of my profound repentance, in expiation for my sins of the past."

"Your sins, my poor sovereign! Which? That of having been repulsed, hated, despised by the King? That of having rejected the presumptuous love of the Red Cardinal, of that man of iron who dared turn to you with his hands stained by the blood of your followers?"

"No!" said Anne, in a low voice, "but that of having too often forgotten that I was Queen of France, and having stirred revolt against him who, in spite of his faults, remains my sovereign, my King!"

"He himself forced you to it," cried the Duchess, passionately. "He pushed you to it with his cold disdain, his cruel suspicions . . ."

"Silence!"

"By his unjust and fierce jealousy."

"Silence, I command you! You alone in the world have no right to speak thus. You alone, alas, know that his jealousy and his suspicions are not entirely unjustified."

The Queen bowed her head as if crushed by the memory of a secret shame. Marie de Chevreuse understood. She looked at her for a moment in silence. Then, with a violent gesture, she seemed to dispel this memory of the past. In a tone of sad reproach, she said:

"I did not expect to find my Queen so deeply changed that she would disown her friends, and bless the hand that struck her."

"No, Marie, I do not forget the days of my youth. I have proved this to you in opening my sad heart, as in those beautiful days of old. I have not lost the memory of those happy moments we lived together, side by side, not as a Queen and her servant, but like two friends, two sisters. Often, in my hours of solitude, I relived those blessed times, when we were just two foolish children running hand in hand through the forest at Fontainebleau, or on the green grass at Chantilly."

"Anne, sweet friend, why then do you refuse to listen to my voice?"

"Because I remember how that frivolity ended—in tears . . . in remorse . . . in blood!"

The Queen remained silent, overcome by emotion. Her companion leaned forward, and spoke quickly, softly into her ear:

"Then you should also remember him, who consecrated to your beauty the sincerest, the deepest devotion. He who loved you as one should love a Queen, as one should love a saint, and who died for this love. You should recall the memory of Lord Buckingham!"

With a sudden movement, the Queen stood up, assuming her former dignity. A terrible pallor covered her face. With an air of offended dignity, she cried:

"Silence! The Queen does not wish to hear that name!"

Sadly, she added:

"If, in the madness of my youth, I forgot for a moment my duties as a sovereign, I have paid for that moment of abandon by a long and cruel penance."

The Duchess interrupted, violently:

"He paid for it with every drop of his blood! But he did not think he had paid too high a price!"

Tears fell from the Queen's eyes. She covered her face with her beautiful hands, and sank, sobbing, upon the bench.

"Oh, Marie, why do you recall that terrible memory?"

"It should never be effaced from your heart! The blood of a man was shed for you. And that blood has not been avenged!"

"Speak no more; you are breaking my heart!"

"I must, since you have been able to forget."

The Queen, sobbing and crushed, listened now, dominated by the implacable determination of her friend.

"I realize how cruel I seem to you, how pitiless. You have forced me to do this. I have told you, I can never turn back. I must accomplish my mission to the very end. I might even have to break your poor heart—and yet, for you, I would give my life.

"Understand then what has been done. Slowly, patiently, in the sadness of my exile, I wove webs that will in the end ensnare our enemy, envelop him in an inextricable mesh. Your enemy is in our power. Against him I have joined his scattered opponents in an alliance: Lorraine, England, Spain. At a signal, the tempest bursts on him, uproots him, destroys him.

"This signal you alone can give! I ask it of you! I implore you!"

The Queen stopped her with a noble gesture:

"Do you dare dream such a thing! I! The wife of the King of France!"

"For the King, Madame, for the King himself, you should act. It is high time to save him from the infamous yoke under which he has too long been."

"I, to become a rebel . . . !"

"A rebel! All of France is with you. The King himself is a rebel, since he promised Cinq-Mars to dismiss the Cardinal.

"Briefly, you have the choice between two alternatives: to stand with those who love you, against your implacable enemy, or to stand with him, against your friends, against those who died for you, against him who, alone in the world, really loved you."

"What then do you want of me?" asked the wretched Queen, at the end of her resistance.

"One word; one sign of support. Your signature at the foot of a letter. That is all."

"This letter . . . ?"

"A courier will bring it to you from Sedan."

"To whom is it addressed?"

"To the Archduchess, to whom I shall forward it."

Anne made a last effort to resist.

"No, no. I do not wish to. I cannot sign it."

"So be it! You pardon, then, the offences done to Your Royal Majesty!"

"Yes, I pardon them. May God in turn absolve me."

"You absolve also the murderers of your followers?"

"God will judge!"

"You forgive, in your sovereign clemency, all your enemies, all . . . even the assassins of Lord Buckingham?"

"He! Again he!"

"He, always! Remember that at this crucial hour, he listens to you and judges you. He weighs that love which you gave him in exchange for his. Through my voice, he repeats his last word, that final agonized prayer to you: *Remember!*"

The Queen stood up, as if to fly away from these horrible memories. Her strength was gone; panting with emotion, she collapsed upon the bench.

The inexorable Duchess continued:

"Remember! Remember Amiens!"

Anne shuddered.

"It was in a garden like this, sweet with the perfume of flowers. It was at an hour like this, when nature is most lovely, the air most pure. He was about to leave, to part from you, forever, without a word of consolation, a tender memory, in exchange for the undying devotion he had consecrated to you, a divine love. . . ."

"It would have been better so!" murmured the Queen, almost inaudibly.

"Near you were two beings who loved each other with all the strength of youth: Lord Montague and your friend, the Duchess of Chevreuse."

"They could, *they*. The royal majesty did not strangle them!" cried the Queen.

"Love is compassionate. They swore that their poor friends should not part in despair, without telling you, for the last time, of the burning passion that consumed his soul—without carrying away the knowledge that, secretly, your heart answered."

"Alas!"

"There, on that immortal night, at the supreme moment of separation, the Queen was only a woman, with all her weaknesses, with all her graces."

"Oh, stop! Speak no more!"

"Have not a moment's regret, Madame. Love beautifies and ennobles all it touches. The man who loved you was worthy of you!"

"But, since . . . since," interrupted the Queen with passion, "since that divine night, since that horrible night, that one, imperishable night, which I have cursed and blessed, whose engulfing memory I can never forget, never knowing whether I weep for shame, or joy . . ."

"Afterward? What difference? You loved!"

"Oh, Marie, afterward—you know well enough."

The Queen stopped, quivering. With closed eyes, she seemed to pass again through those hours of terror and agony.

In a low voice, almost a breath, Mme. de Chevreuse whispered:

"Why tremble so? What happened afterward, no one knows. The secret is ours alone, and is safely guarded. Lord Buckingham died without breathing a word, and the Duchess of Chevreuse will die with sealed lips."

Anne grasped her friend's hand:

"I have sinned, you know full well. And cruelly has God punished me!"

"God!" exclaimed the Duchess, in a bitter tone of voice.

"He struck me twice: in him whom I loved, and in . . ."

"Is it *God* who struck you?" interrupted Mme. de Chevreuse. "Was it not rather a man, a proud, ambitious creature?"

"The Cardinal?"

"Yes, the Cardinal! The hands of the assassins of Buckingham were furnished arms by others, by unknown accomplices."

"Who were they?"

"Lord Montague and I searched for a long time—in vain."

"So you see . . ."

"Wait! These accomplices still live, their sinister hand can be detected in another crime. Know, then, that Felton's crime, the assassination of the Duke, did not satiate their vengeful wrath."

"What are you saying?"

"A second crime followed. A more horrible, more cowardly crime even."

The Queen stood up, terrified. Her eyes rested on her friend in agonized suspense.

Mme. de Chevreuse seemed to hesitate, but, quickly made up her mind:

"You must know everything. Then you may judge whether these friends, and their leader, are worthy of your pardon. It is sixteen years since we have seen one another, and this may be our last meeting in this world. I must give you the truth!"

"Oh, God!" gasped Anne, her heart frozen with fear.

"The godless hatred of these enemies followed the noble lord beyond the barrier of the tomb. His blood was shed a second time."

The Queen trembled, nearly fainting. She held herself steady by a tremendous exertion of will.

"Sacred weakness, even innocence, did not find mercy in their sight."

"Oh, God! Quick, finish, in mercy. The child . . ."

"The child of Lord Buckingham . . ."

A piercing cry arose from the heart of Anne of Austria: "Is he dead?"

"Soon after the assassination of his father, he . . . he disappeared."

The Queen breathed a long sigh. Then, pale as death, she fainted.

The Duchess rushed forward. She held Anne in her arms, trying to revive her. Broken-hearted, she whispered:

"Madame . . . Anne . . . my darling."

But the poor Queen did not answer. Her senseless body fell upon the stone bench.

CHAPTER XVI

D'ARTAGNAN MEETS CYRANO

THE two men, whose appearance had so startled the Cavalier on leaving the Rue de la Bourbe separated at the corner of the Rue d'Enfer. One of them disappeared toward the Midi gate, while the other turned down the dark little by-street with a firm step.

"*Sandis!*" he groaned, as he stumbled along the dark road, "there was no need of all those oaths. It would take the devil himself to draw a sword in such a dark hole!"

Groping his way along the wall, d'Artagnan's hand touched the door of the cloister. He then looked about for some corner in which to shelter himself from the night wind that had sprung up, and was now blowing keenly.

Finding a little recess in the wall, he huddled there as best he could, covering himself up to the ears in his cavalry cloak. This done, he again groaned: "The devil take it! It's only in the glorious service of the Cardinal and his cursed Mazarin that one has such pleasant duties. What a reckless affair this is—exactly suited to a Musketeer!" he added, sarcastically.

In the meantime the Cavalier hastened toward the island of the Cité. Taking the Rue de la Harpe, which was a continuation of the Rue d'Enfer, he easily reached the Seine. The fortunate meeting with various belated revellers helped him to find his way to *The Pineapple.*

Would Cyrano still be there? He had left him writing verses across the table from Saint-Amant, who was still stuffing himself with food, and Linières, who was methodically emptying bottles. These serious pursuits were likely to engage the men for a good hour. But two o'clock had already struck! The possibility of having to follow his friend to his lodgings, in the Rue Grénetail, disturbed the Cavalier, and he quickened his pace.

It was with a deep sigh of relief that he saw, at the end of the smoke-filled room, now nearly deserted, the figures of the three intrepid night-owls. Among overturned stools, tables heaped high with plates and empty bottles, the gallant companions still kept their place. They looked like the only living men left on a silent battlefield.

It is, perhaps, false to say that they "kept their place." The truth is that in the fulfilling of his duties, Linières had gloriously fallen asleep, glass in hand, while Saint-Amant, a large smile on his lips but eyes closed, was apparently indulging in some pleasant gastronomic dream. Cyrano, alone, remained awake. Still in the grip of his inspiration, he continued to cover sheet after sheet of paper on a little corner of the table.

The young man went up to him at once, and, in a few words, informed him of the recent events. He had found M. Bernard. Better still, he had taken him to a convent where a "Goddess" awaited him. His godmother had told him to look out for the safety of this important personage, and particularly to keep the Rue de la Bourbe clear at the time of his departure. He had, therefore, come to ask his companion to lend him his assistance in the performance of this task. He did not think it wise to mention his suspicions of the Cardinal, nor his close escape from the trap of Barbette's. Knowing Cyrano's distaste for political intrigue, he steered the conversation away from that dangerous ground.

At first the poet tried to follow the various explanations of his young friend, but each new sentence only increased his bewilderment. Frankly, the problem seemed too complicated for the poet's mind.

As soon as the Cavalier had finished, he sprang up from the table:

"All of which means," he said, "that you need me?"

"I feared that alone I might not be able to carry out my instructions."

"*Corbac!* Not another word—I'm with you!"

He buckled on his belt, and seized his coat and hat.

"Heaven be praised!" thought the Cavalier, "*there* is a friend! You don't have to repeat things to him."

Cyrano was already at the door.

"Where do we go?"

"Rue de la Bourbe."

"But that's the Convent of the Carmelites!"

"Exactly!"

"Right! And we're to be there . . . ?"

"Before four o'clock."

"Splendid! I'll have time to finish my ballad on the way."

"Your ballad?"

"Yes, a little masterpiece I'm composing. I'll read it to you tomorrow. You can judge then for yourself."

With these words they left *The Pineapple.*

"Brr!" shivered the poet. "There's a biting wind tonight."

"We'll get warm from walking," answered the Cavalier.

"And from fighting," added Cyrano in a happy manner.

"Fighting?"

"The devil take it, yes! If the road isn't clear, it must be made so, *vivadiou!* Now, silence. I've got one."

"One what?"

"A rhyme, *mordioux*, a rhyme!"

So the two friends walked on in complete silence.

During this time, d'Artagnan, sad victim of his instructions, continued to feel the cold in his corner of the alleyway and to grumble against the Cardinal and his assistant. He included in his curses convents and those who made pious visits there at night. He consoled himself by repeating the verse of the Latin poet:

"*Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.*"

Ah, if only the Abbé Aramis could have heard that!

The clock struck in melancholy succession the quarter, the half, and the hour, and nothing happened. The impetuous Musketeer found the minutes passing with irritating slowness. To warm himself, he walked up and down the street, never losing sight of the little door which it was his duty to watch.

Half past three had just struck, and he was continuing his monotonous walk when, suddenly, he heard a noise from the end of the street toward the Rue d'Enfer. He came to a dead stop, listening. There could be no doubt, some one was coming in his direction. With quick instinct, d'Artagnan put his hand upon his sword, but on reflection had to withdraw it again.

"Cadedis!" he swore, half, laughing, half furious, "that was a close call. I nearly forgot my famous instructions."

And he repeated, in an ironic tone:

" 'Not to draw, this night, my sword from its scabbard!' I mustn't think of that, it's too maddening."

He wrapped himself in his cloak again, and retired to the recess in the wall. Near him passed two shadows, unaware of his presence.

A youthful voice broke the silence:

"Here we are! Not a sound! Everything goes well, by my star."

A deeper voice answered:

"Except that it's so dark you can't see your own toes!"

"Good weather for our business."

"Cavalier, my excellent fellow, you who are lucky enough to be on excellent terms with the stars, can't you ask them to shine a bit for us!"

D'Artagnan then heard a light knock on the little door.

"They're letting them know they've arrived," he thought.

Through a grating, a soft voice asked:

"Is it you, Cavalier?"

"It is I."

"Have you had any unfortunate encounters?"

"None. The street is as clear as you could desire."

D'Artagnan laughed silently.

"Come in, then. You are needed."

"Very good," thought the Musketeer, "my duty is to watch for their exit. I don't mind their entering."

The door was quietly opened. A dim light enabled d'Artagnan to recognize the figure of a young girl. A second shadow slipped through the opening, that of a young man.

"Lovers!" sighed the Musketeer. "Happy age! It recalls my nocturnal walks with that poor little Constance Bonacieux."

With the back of his sleeve, he dried a sweet tear of memory or regret.

"Wait!" said the young man, "I'm not alone."

"Who accompanies you?"

"I, *vivadiou!*"

A third shadow was seen in the pale light. D'Artagnan, surprised, almost burst into a laugh. The profile which was outlined was most fantastic, like that of some great devil springing out of a box.

"Heaven help me!" thought the Musketeer. "It's Signor Punchinello in person!"

The man certainly had long legs, long arms—and a long nose!

"Yes, *capédédiou!* I am here, beautiful lady. And you may assure M. Bernard that he is well guarded."

"In that case, we will leave you on duty alone," said the young girl, laughing. "You will allow me to take the Cavalier away with me?"

"*Allow* you! He would never forgive me if I had the audacity to make the slightest objection."

"Farewell then, and have no fear of ghosts," added the charming mocker.

"Gascons never had fear!"

The little door closed.

"An agreeable interlude!" commented d'Artagnan to himself. "My dear Mazarini was very considerate to send this strange marionette from his own country to amuse me while I wait."

From this moment, d'Artagnan did not make the slightest movement. He heard the enemy's sentry walk back and forth near him.

A quarter of an hour passed. The Musketeer's statuesque immobility was beginning to benumb him. The situation was even more exasperating because this fantastic long-nosed creature was able to move about freely. He heard him repeat, as he walked up and down, endless syllables which he scanned, and senseless words, which he seemed to weigh with great care.

"The scoundrel!" groaned d'Artagnan.

How could he know that the sentry was composing a ballad?

More minutes dragged by. D'Artagnan, motionless as a corpse, was beginning to freeze. A shiver ran over him —his instructions had not forbidden him to shiver.

"Oh, the devil take it! What's that hobgoblin with the long nose—and long rapier—mumbling to himself!"

Cyrano had just passed him, so close that he touched his cape. But the poet, in his state of profound absorption, had not the slightest suspicion that another was present. He tried two rhymes that he seemed to find highly satisfactory.

The Musketeer could not warm himself by walking nor by becoming divinely inspired. Instead, he felt that he was slowly congealing. He braced himself again, however, resolved, at any cost, to carry through to the finish the statesman's instructions:

"No violence, no noise!"

Alas, he had not taken into consideration one of those thousand little tricks that fate plays on unsuspecting mortals despite their carefully made plans. A grain of sand can derange the wheels of the best regulated machine. A breath of wind can dissipate vast plans. Small causes produce great effects! There can be no doubt that the poet would never have suspected the presence of another man except for one of these malicious tricks of fate. But it was written in the book of destiny that Cyrano should meet d'Artagnan.

Thus, at the mercy of the cold night and stiff from his immobility, the brave, prudent, wise d'Artagnan shivered . . . *Corbac!* What could the matter be with him? A chill, apparently. A powerful tickling sensation invaded his nose, so that he was forced to pinch it vigorously. He hoped thus to control the explosion that seemed imminent. Alas, this therapeutical operation only led to a worse result. Suddenly, vanquished by a superior force which would have overcome the stoutest will, the Musketeer sneezed.

Cyrano stopped at once, and cried in a stentorian voice:

"Who goes there?"

Naturally, there was no answer.

"*Pardieu!* This is extraordinary. A sneeze rarely comes without a sneezer. *Mordieu!* Why won't he answer? Who goes there!"

The silence continued. Cyrano struck a flint. By the small flame he saw something vague, black, motionless. A man!

"Monsieur," said the poet with the most exquisite politeness, "I am charmed to make your acquaintance."

D'Artagnan remained completely insensible to this gracious attention. Only, as sneezes so often come in pairs, he repeated the action.

"God bless you!" commented Cyrano.

Then, as the man of stone remained obstinately silent, he added:

"*Parbleu,* Monsieur! Unless you have taken a pinch of snuff, I would venture to suggest that you might be catching cold. Your immobility does not help you. Wouldn't you like to move on a few steps? It might warm you up!"

Profound silence.

"Ah, ha! my friend. Are you voiceless?"

Again the Musketeer sneezed.

"There now, you see how unpleasant this street is! There is a pernicious draft here."

Cyrano suddenly stopped his bantering. With a tone of vague menace he said:

"You'll meet your death, my dear sir, if you insist on loitering here!"

This time the poet had struck home. The shadow seemed to become animate. The man in the cloak made a movement.

"At last!" thought Cyrano. "The stone is alive. I'm a second Pygmalion!"

"You are a Gascon?" demanded the shadow.

"At your service," was the immediate reply. "I'm a Gascon from Gascony! Which means that my blood is hot, and that I like, when I speak, to be understood—and answered. Have the goodness to come out of there, I beg of you."

And, as the shadow refused to budge, he added:

"You ought to know that a Gascon does not like to repeat things."

"I know it," answered the other. "I'm one too!"

"Very good!" said Cyrano, without moving. "In that case you can understand me. Would it please you to accompany me away from here? We shall find an opportunity to warm ourselves."

"*Cadédis*, it would enchant me to accept such a gracious invitation. But, for the moment, other affairs hold me to the spot. Allow me then to decline. You must walk by yourself."

"Ah, I see! We are acting as spy tonight, eh?"

For a moment d'Artagnan did not feel cold. His blood beat against his ears. However, he controlled himself, and replied amiably:

"What was that? Spy? That is a word we don't know in Gascony."

"Listen, my dear fellow. Let us not continue this game too long. The shorter the better. I believe that we may understand each other quite easily. We both agree, I trust, on this fact: one or the other of us is superfluous here."

To this direct insult, the Musketeer gave no answer. He tugged at his moustache viciously, and groaned:

"May the devil confound Mazarini!"

"You are too much a man of spirit not to be also a man of honor. Now that I look more closely, I see hanging by your side something which has an extraordinary resemblance to a sword. That instrument should not be attached there for the sole purpose of decoration."

In a quivering voice, d'Artagnan snarled:

"Move out of here."

"Oh, gladly!" was Cyrano's bantering reply, "if you will be kind enough to follow me."

The Musketeer regained control of himself. Using all the strength of his will he was able to resist the temptation to put an end to this baiting. He determined not to be drawn into conversation.

The poet, annoyed, muttered:

"Certainly this can't be a man. It is some lonely statue. We shall soon find out. This is outrageous! I must dislodge the impudent rascal!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE SCABBARD!

More and more enraged by the calm attitude of his opponent, Cyrano continued his attack:

"It seems that we are patient."

"Very!" answered the statue.

"Do we fear to spoil our coat . . . or to tear a hole in our lovely doublet . . . it cost a great deal, didn't it?"

"A great deal!" came the echo.

"Or does our sword have weak lungs like its master? Is it afraid of catching cold this damp evening?"

"Quite true!" replied the other.

Cyrano lost patience.

"This automaton, then, has no feelings at all? It's absurd! Why waste my time on him? One might as well try to move a rock."

At that moment the calm of the evening was broken by the deep striking of a clock:

"One, two, three! Good heavens!" gasped the poet, "it is already a quarter to four!"

Time was flying. In a few minutes the Cavalier and his important companion in adventure would appear. He must, at all cost, get rid of this impudent observer, who, obviously, was placed there for a purpose.

He began again, more roughly:

"Come, enough of this fooling! Let's end this now."

In a determined manner he walked up to d'Artagnan, who waited him, always motionless.

"Come out of there, or by heavens I'll . . ."

The raised arm of the poet did not move, for an iron grip held it.

"Now, keep calm, *sandis!*" came the voice of the lieutenant, trembling with excitement in spite of all efforts at control.

With a quick jump backward, the supple Cyrano had broken from the confining grip.

When d'Artagnan had been forced to defend himself, the movement had rolled back his cape. The piercing eye of Cyrano discovered the jacket with the embroidered cross.

"A Musketeer!"

The poet returned to the attack with redoubled energy. Coming up to within a few inches of his imperturbable opponent he hissed at him:

"*Capédédiou!* Your forbearance no longer astonishes me, my man! You are a Musketeer!"

Cut to the quick by this irony, d'Artagnan shook from head to foot.

"Which signifies . . . ?" he asked.

"That I am a cadet in the Guards, Company Carbon de Castel-Jaloux, and that one who bears the musket has never been known to stand up against a Gascon cadet of the Guards."

This was too much! The brave lieutenant had been able, with difficulty, to endure personal insult, irritating irony, infuriating provocations. But this time the insult was not addressed to him. It included the corps to which it was his great glory to belong. The poet's last taunt struck him like a blow on the cheek, not him alone, but likewise all his friends, past and present.

"Aramis, Porthos, Athos," he cried. "You are insulted, my friends!"

Quickly, with a movement stronger than his will, he drew his sword half-way out of the scabbard. But he controlled himself, and put it in again with a despairing gesture.

"I have sworn!" he muttered.

Cyrano waited, still keeping his insolent and provocative attitude.

Suddenly the Musketeer smiled. The man of stone became animate. An enigmatic look came into his face, a malicious twinkle gleamed in his eyes.

Stepping toward his adversary, he said briefly:

"Come!"

"At last!" sighed Cyrano.

A few steps further on they found a large recess in the wall. From this place the darkness, still dense, did not allow them to see the door.

Laughing to himself, the poet drew his sword. D'Artagnan had taken off his great cloak. Already on guard, he waited.

The two adversaries could scarcely see each other.

"This is more like it!" said Cyrano exultingly. "Here's a meeting that does not lack originality. You can't even see the swords."

"Zounds!" answered the Musketeer, "you can feel them. That's enough."

Without another word, the two crossed blades and the fight was on.

Behind the wall, in the garden of the Carmelites, the sad, tragic scene between Anne of Austria and the Duchess of Chevreuse was nearing its close.

The cold air of the night rather than the attentions of her friend had revived the poor Queen. When, after this collapse, she opened her eyes, a poignant look of stupor appeared on her face.

"Good God!" thought the Duchess, alarmed, "did this last blow break her poor spirit?"

Anne shuddered. On her colorless face, tears began to run down, slow tears, which she did not try to restrain or hide. For a long time she remained thus, body rigid, arms motionless, lips quivering. Finally, she spoke, as if to herself:

"The child! The son of—Lord Buckingham!—disappeared . . . !"

Then, as if to escape from some torturing vision, she covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, God, it's too terrible!" she said in a heart-rending voice.

Marie de Chevreuse slipped to her knees, and supported the Queen.

"Courage, dear sovereign, he may not be dead."

"Alas, they'll kill him—as they killed the father."

Then, collecting all her energy, she cried violently:

"Speak! I want to know everything. For sixteen years they have kept the truth from me, lied to me. I have the right to know the entire truth. No more lies, no more half-truths. I demand it."

"Ask, Madame, and I will answer."

The Queen passed her hand over her forehead, as if to collect her scattered wits.

"Let me see! That child, that innocent little babe, Guitaut took him to Buckingham?"

"The noble lord received him from the hands of your loyal servant."

"In secret?"

"In the most complete secrecy. The very evening of the child's arrival in London he entrusted him to the most faithful of his servants, an Irishman named Patrick."

"And this Patrick took the babe away?"

"Following his lord's orders, he took him to Scotland, to the castle of Kildar, where he was to be raised far from the court and from prying observation. Poor, noble Buckingham! He followed the line of duty which prudence dictated to him. He sacrificed a father's love as he had been forced to sacrifice a lover's heart.

"At Kildar the child had his father's friends as protectors, Lord Angus Mac Diarmid, and his son, Lord Mac Gregor. The Duke had charged them to watch over the child's life and fortune."

"Were they trustworthy men?"

"They were the noble lord's vassals. He had brought them up and enriched them. He could depend on their gratitude and on their blind devotion."

"And then?"

The Duchess paused a moment, and, speaking with great care as if to an invalid, continued:

"Then came the sad hour when the noble Duke fell dead from the stroke of an assassin's knife."

"The child was three years old?"

"Yes, three. He remained alone in the world, carrying on his frail shoulders the heavy burden of a heritage of glory and of blood."

"And not a soul to protect him?"

"Not a soul?" repeated the Duchess in a tone of reproach.

"I am unfair, I know. You and Lord Montague promised me on that day to watch over him."

"Alas, it was even then too late. When Lord Montague arrived at Kildar in Scotland, he found Lord Mac Diarmid and his son in despair. In that mountainous country storms are more terrible than in the low countries. They sometimes cause the destruction of forests, blow houses to the ground and make the rivers overflow their banks. The preceding night, during a devastating tempest, the child and the devoted Patrick had disappeared. . . ."

"Good God!"

"The servant was faithful to the end to the promise he had given his master. He did not allow himself to be torn from the precious trust confided to him."

"Tell me all—they died together?"

"No! Their bodies were never found!"

"They were stolen away, then? You do not deceive me?"

"Oh, Madame!"

"Forgive me! I have been lied to and deceived so often."

"They could have had no reason to injure the child; there was no one who could have suspected its identity!"

"Yes, yes, you are right. But then you should have done everything to find them, have moved heaven and earth to rescue them if alive—and, if they were dead, to avenge them!"

"I have told you, Madame, that Lord Montague and I have spared no pains to track them down. Heaven has not allowed us to do so. We do not yet know the abductors of the son—nor the murderers of the father."

Anne bent her head, overwhelmed, and murmured bitterly:

"To be a Queen, and yet be unable to do anything for those one loves!"

A pale glow appeared in the east. Dawn had not yet come, but the dull, wan light that precedes it began to tint the cloudy sky.

Marie de Chevreuse arose:

"Madame," she said, "it is time for us to separate."

At the end of the walk, the youthful figures of Claire and the Cavalier had just appeared. Seeing them, the Queen stood up suddenly, swept away by a feeling of violent exaltation:

"Yes," she said quietly, "you are right again. I can neither forget nor pardon. It is not I alone whom they have struck. An innocent child has been the victim of their most cowardly vengeance. The wretches who committed the crime have escaped. But God will deliver them to us some day! But never mind that! The blow was directed from above. It is there we must strike. That letter?"

"You consent, then?"

"To everything; I will avenge them."

"Oh, thank you, my Queen! At last I discover the heart of my friend."

Sobbing, the two held each other in an affectionate embrace.

At this moment the young people arrived in sight of the stone bench. Thunderstruck, the Cavalier stopped, as if rooted to the ground. In the austere setting of a convent, M. Bernard held in his arms a penitent, whose eyes were filled with tears. He looked at Claire, whose frank face did not show the slightest amazement at this extraordinary spectacle.

Finally, M. Bernard turned to them and in a soft, melodious voice, which completely fascinated the young soldier, said:

"Come near!"

The Cavalier started forward, but suddenly, stopped in amazement. The divine face of the penitent had just become visible to him. He felt his knees give way before this majestic beauty.

"Approach, Cavalier," continued M. Bernard. "Mlle. de Cernay has assured us of your loyalty. You are now to listen to the commands of your Queen. . . ."

The young man, his heart beating furiously, sank to his knees.

"Monsieur," said the Queen, "I do not know who you are, but Mlle. de Cernay answers for you. With such a sponsor, you can be nothing but faithful, brave and loyal. Are you ready to sacrifice your liberty—and perhaps your life?"

"For you, Madame, yes, gladly," he answered fervently.

Anne smiled:

"And yet you are so young. At your age life holds many charms."

"A soldier's life is a gamble, and the only thing that counts is the worth of those one serves."

"You are ambitious, then?"

"To serve you, Madame, yes!"

"Well answered! I do not ask your name, but I shall demand it on your return."

Saying these words, so full of promise, the Queen extended her beautiful hand to the Cavalier, who pressed it to his lips rapturously. With great majesty, she continued:

"You are, then, to accompany this gentleman whose safety we entrust to your valor. You will obey him as you would your Queen."

"I promise, Madame."

"Will you have the courage not to retreat in the face of any danger?"

"The motto which I follow answers for that."

"What is it?"

"'Carry on to the finish!'"

"Go then! And return faithfully. At Sedan, where you are to hasten without delay, you will receive from M. de Soissons a package which you will bring to the Hôtel de Nevers."

"To the Hôtel de Nevers."

"You will deliver this message only to Mlle. de Cernay."

"To Mlle. de Cernay," repeated the young man, rapturously.

"To her only. She will then give you fresh instructions."

"You shall be obeyed, Madame," said the Cavalier, rising.

"Be careful, above all, to avoid traps along the way."

"Oh, Madame, I have already had some acquaintance with them. They have no terrors for me."

The Queen looked at him more closely. He saw a look of sorrow come over her face.

"*He* would be just like that!" she murmured.

In the distance the clock of the Chartreux struck four.

"We must leave!" said M. Bernard. "It would be rash to tarry longer."

The handsome gentleman again held his arms out for the Queen, and embraced her affectionately. Then he turned toward Mlle. de Cernay. With an instinctive movement, the young girl rushed forward. He seized her and pressed her against his heart, kissing lovingly her golden locks, her forehead, her tear-stained eyes.

"Farewell, farewell, my child!"

Anne of Austria, exhausted, sank back on the stone bench. She tried to restrain the sobs that shook her whole body. Then her eyes again resumed their habitual expression of sadness.

The Cavalier thought he heard her whisper softly:

"Alas! She can embrace her child, *she* . . . !"

With a choking heart, his head swimming after so many amazing incidents, the young man followed M. Bernard, whom Claire led toward the little door.

Outside the wall the duel continued. The two fighters were equally determined to hold the field. But no result had been reached. Cyrano exhausted all the resources of his cunning against the imperturbable coolness of the Musketeer. Each of his strokes was neatly parried. His feints met with no better success.

But what surprised the poet more than this cleverness of his adversary was the fact that he made no attempt to return a single blow. The little street was still steeped in darkness. The invisible sword of d'Artagnan seemed endowed with a miraculous quality. It parried a stroke, then disappeared. It tossed the point of Cyrano's rapier from one side to another. And, most amazing of all, the Musketeer's sword, this diabolical weapon, had a strange, hollow sound. It did not ring and clash like an ordinary blade. This scene through which he had been moving, which seemed to be formed of enchantment and sorcery, was beginning to infuriate the valiant poet:

"What a fighter! What skill!" he thought. "But, zoünds, what an amazing rapier!"

In order to dispel this tantalizing impression, Cyrano lowered his guard for a moment. He awaited some quick attack, which would allow him to change his tactics. But, oh marvel! his adversary did not move. He remained motionless, his sword ready to counter an attack.

"The devil take me!" grumbled the poet to himself. "I think the scoundrel's teasing me."

Time was flying. Already a pale light gave warning of dawn. Cyrano fought furiously, employing every trick at his command. He must end this at once, *milledious!*

Just then the clock struck four and the door of the cloister opened. M. Bernard and his companion slipped out. They heard the clashing of steel on their right, but not a person was in sight. The street was clear. They went quickly toward the left, and disappeared down the Rue Saint-Jacques.

Still mindful of his instructions, d'Artagnan's quick ear heard the noise. He stepped back a pace so as to hear better. But already Cyrano understood the danger, and not wishing to leave his adversary time to look around, rushed at him with renewed energy.

After a sudden feint at the face, he came back on guard quickly, and then lunged at the body of the man. A neat parry met his stroke, a parry which brought his attack to a full stop.

Cyrano suddenly drew back in bewilderment. A few rays of light began to illuminate the little street. By this pale light the furious poet had just seen—at last. He understood. Yes. He understood why his opponent did not attack, why the duel continued indefinitely, without any possible decision. He knew now why this enchanted sword, so invincible in parrying, was never used for the attack.

Furious, and, at the same time, full of admiration, he shouted:

"Eh, *vivadious*, Monsieur! This is no game! I'm no dunce who's come here to be baited!"

D'Artagnan saluted with his sword:

"I regret, Monsieur, not to have been able to give you more satisfaction this time. But I had made a vow!"

"A vow? *Corbac!*"

What had so astonished Cyrano was the knowledge that his adversary had fought *with his blade encased in the scabbard!*

"Come!" said d'Artagnan, smiling in spite of himself at his opponent's stupor, "it's you, after all, who gained the victory! I'll have my revenge another time!"

"You will find me ready!" groaned Cyrano.

Then, although too late to catch up with them, the Musketeer rushed after the two figures who had disappeared into the darkness.

The poet put his blade into its scabbard, vexed, but, after all, rather pleased with the outcome.

"There's a man I'd like to meet again—some day when he hasn't made any vows! Then we'll see! He's a Gascon—and a bit more!"

Then at his most leisurely pace, Cyrano walked to the Rue d'Enfer. Having nothing better to do, he started in again where he had left off on the rhymes of his interminable ballad.

CHAPTER XVIII

LADY'S MAID AND MESSENGER

After having exchanged compliments with his impetuous adversary, d'Artagnan rushed off in pursuit of the fugitives.

But the latter had made good use of the few minutes Cyrano's swordsmanship had gained for them. When the Musketeer reached the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Jacques, he found both it and the little square in front of the Capuchin monastery completely deserted. He went on as far as the Rue du Puits-de-l'Orme. Not a trace of them was to be seen. The fugitives seemed to have vanished in the thin morning haze. Beyond him, the Musketeer beheld nothing but the fields and bushes, and the low, regular countryside.

Discouraged, the lieutenant returned to the Rue d'Enfer, which had been agreed upon as a meeting-place.

As he walked along, he grumbled:

"Devil take it! Each man to his own trade. A Musketeer is not a police spy. At this sort of game the stupidest schoolboy would make an ass of me."

However, at heart, he felt rather apprehensive, though he would never have admitted it. He would have to reappear before the Cardinal and give an account of his mission.

How would he be able to weather the anger of his irascible master! When all was said and done, he had broken the spirit of his oath, and had allowed his opponents to play with him.

Mortified, he twisted his moustache.

"Curses on that long-legged Punchinello! If only fate will put him in my hands again, we'll have a little reckoning to settle!"

In this frame of mind, d'Artagnan had reached the reservoir of Arcueil when he heard a familiar voice call to him:

"Hola! M. d'Artagnan! You're in an amazing hurry!"

Monseigneur Mazarin came up to him.

"Well!" asked the Italian in a pleased manner, "did you get a glimpse of our night birds?"

The Musketeer stopped, and answered in a surly tone:

"Certainly, I saw them. But that didn't keep them from escaping right under my nose."

Mazarin received this observation with a cheerful laugh.

"There were three, weren't there?"

"Three—two phantoms and a demon!"

"And they came out from the Carmelites'?"

"The two phantoms did. I don't know where the demon came from—hell, probably."

"What did the two phantoms look like?"

"Oh, well . . ."

"Wait! Did one have the figure of a young soldier while the other appeared to be a handsome blond courtier?"

"Yes, *sandis!* That's correct!" replied the Musketeer, wondering what purpose these useless questions served, since the night's plan had failed.

"Of all that, M. d'Artagnan, you could be a witness, if necessary?"

"Certainly!"

"And would you recognize the courtier if the occasion should arise?"

"*Parbleu*, yes—always on the condition that I see him!"

The sly face of the Italian displayed a triumphant smile. He concluded, as he rubbed his hands:

"That's all I needed!"

Then, walking quickly along the Rue d'Enfer, he said:

"Come, lieutenant, follow me. We've won the first hand. Now for the second!"

D'Artagnan, amazed at the apparent satisfaction of the Italian, murmured:

"There's a man who's easily satisfied. No difficulty with him. H'm! it's the *other* I must face now!"

At the thought of having to stand before the vehement Cardinal, the valiant Musketeer felt shivers run up and down his spine.

When they reached the city gate, they found a post-chaise apparently waiting for them. Grouped around it, but at a respectful distance, could be seen in the dim morning light the silhouette of a troop of horsemen.

Mazarin approached the carriage quickly, and opened the door.

"Everything goes well," he said. "Monsieur d'Artagnan accomplished his delicate task perfectly. He saw and recognized the persons at the Carmelites'."

"Where is he?" inquired a dry voice that made the Musketeer tremble.

Instinctively he braced himself to give the explanation which he felt must be forthcoming. But, to his great surprise, he heard Mazarin reply, without turning around:

"Following our orders, they were allowed to leave Paris and start on their way. Without knowing it, they have been kept in sight all the time. They passed the gate of Saint-Jacques about a quarter of an hour ago. At this moment they are galloping along the southern highway."

"Well, well!" thought d'Artagnan, "Monseigneur is no fool. He took all precautions."

"How much of a start did you say they had?"

"Fifteen or twenty minutes, no more!"

"Shall we catch them?"

"It will be the simplest thing in the world for these gentlemen of the guard, with their fast horses."

"Well, then, let no time be lost. After them! And remember above all, let no harm come to her. . . ."

"Yes, yes, to Monsieur Bernard's person," interrupted Mazarin, putting a finger on his lips.

Then, turning to the Musketeer who had been listening in amazement to this conversation with an unseen speaker, he said:

"You understand, M. d'Artagnan. His Eminence orders that above all, at any cost, you are to secure the person of the blond gentleman of the Carmelites."

The lieutenant approached, and, at the door of the carriage, recognized the figure of his terrible master. The latter, in spite of the Musketeer's presentiment, seemed to be in an excellent humor.

"Ah, ha! M. d'Artagnan," he said familiarly, "things didn't go so badly then, eh?"

"Splendidly, Monseigneur!"

Enchanted with the pleasant turn of the conversation, d'Artagnan, now once more his confident self, added with the most impudent assurance:

"Even the impossible can be done in the service of Your Eminence!"

"You then followed faithfully your difficult instructions?"

"To the letter, Monseigneur! Not for one second did I draw my sword from its scabbard."

In saying these words, d'Artagnan cast a sly, malicious look at the Italian.

"Your service will be remembered, lieutenant," said Richelieu. "The night is now over, your orders are changed. You may draw your sword as you like, if the opportunity presents itself."

"Then, Monseigneur, I venture to predict that everything will go well!"

"I ask you to seize just one person, the courtier of the Carmelites. I must have him alive."

"Without fail!"

"As for the rest . . . !"

"Enough, Monseigneur," said d'Artagnan joyously, making his blade whistle in the air.

"I see you have understood me. Carry on, then, and bring back M. Bernard safe and sound."

"Where will Monseigneur be pleased to await him?"

The Cardinal thought a moment.

"At the Croix-de-Berny. I shall be there in an hour."

D'Artagnan examined the troop of guardsmen. They waited, motionless, standing near their horses. The men? Picked soldiers! The animals? Fresh and pure-blooded. Perfect! In his mind the Musketeer calculated the position of the fugitives and decided on the road they would follow. With a single glance he saw that everything was in perfect order, and said:

"At Berny, in an hour. We shall await Your Eminence!"

He saluted the Cardinal, looked at Mazarin in a slightly ironical manner, and jumped into the saddle.

"To horse, gentlemen!"

The order was executed with a rattling of steel which seemed to be a good omen.

"Follow me! At a gallop!" commanded d'Artagnan.

He spurred on his beast, and took the lead. The next moment the horsemen disappeared from sight in a cloud of dust.

"All goes well!" said Richelieu. "There's the man I want to have with me! This time, M. de Mazarin, she won't escape us. At last I shall hold my mortal enemy at my mercy!"

"We shall hold her!" corrected Mazarin, to himself.

On an order from the statesman, the carriage started on its way. It was soon lost to sight in the dust of the southern highway.

Three miles ahead of them, two horsemen were galloping furiously down this same highway. The morning breeze fanned their faces, and filled them with a zest that seemed to be communicated to the horses.

As usual M. Bernard was wrapped in enigmatic silence. But the young man was now accustomed to this attitude, and ceased to pay attention to it. Indeed, at the rate at which they were speeding along, they could not have spoken two words without danger to their teeth.

The Cavalier took advantage of this enforced silence to collect his thoughts. Now fully launched on this wild adventure, one idea followed another in his head, as if engendered by the rough rhythm of his galloping horse. The fresh air filled his lungs. He seemed to breathe courage and joy.

At last the dawn, lifting the shadows of the night, had dissipated that world of phantoms and illusions in which he had lived during the preceding hours. And similarly his ideas began to become clear, to resume their natural forms. All became clear and simple. First, as to the casket—the most important consideration. There could be no doubt that it had fallen into unknown hands—wretched hands, which, instead of closing upon the gentleman who galloped beside him, had been able only to seize his cherished possession.

A strange coincidence!

Here he was, bound by a double tie to this stranger, this friend of the Queen. First, by a bond of duty and of sympathy. His sovereign and his fair friend had commanded him to protect his companion; the voice of these two was all-powerful in his heart. Secondly, by a bond of interest, since the same mysterious enemies followed and persecuted both of them. The key to this enigma, *he* possessed—he, M. Bernard! Or, rather, the great nobleman who hid under that name. As a reward for his devotion, this stranger could not refuse the Cavalier his assistance. Through him the young man would discover the identity of his enemies. To find them he would have to follow a long path, full of traps and unknown obstacles.

But what difference now? He could wait. Another road to fortune had opened up. He was the Queen's messenger! It was for her that he rode furiously toward an unknown destination. It was for her he risked his life in a dangerous and mysterious intrigue. The reward would be in proportion to the perils met, to the bravery exhibited! If only he could return alive, his future would be assured. Had not the Queen promised to remember—on his return?

And it was to his star he owed this sudden fortune! To his star? Yes, of course, because he knew now what his Star was; it was Mlle. de Cernay! Lovely little Claire, who, the previous morning, had seemed far away and inaccessible, like some fairy! What a long way he had travelled in one night! He felt attached to her now by a host of very subtle and delicate threads whose slender but powerful hold could not be broken.

No longer did the young soldier have protectors. He had masters! To serve a master! This was the ambition at that time of younger sons, of poor gentlemen, of all those upon whom fortune had not smiled at birth, and who entered the world with no heritage except their swords. When a master was once chosen and accepted, one was devoted to him body and soul, and the one duty henceforth was to be faithful and loyal. He must be followed blindly, in danger as in glory, in adversity, if he fell—even in disgrace, if he slipped from the path of honor. It was as dishonorable to fail one's master, one's lord, as to fail one's King, one's country, or one's God!

And behold, the Cavalier had just given himself to two masters. His Star had chosen for him most worthy ones: first, the Queen of France; second, this handsome nobleman, who rode at his side.

While day-dreaming in this manner, the Cavalier kept glancing at his companion. Attentively, sympathetically, he watched this person who held in his hands his present fate, and his hopes for the future. He did not know yet his real name, but it must be a glorious one. Was he not a bosom friend of the Queen?

To his youthful eyes, Anne of Austria represented the highest embodiment of nobility and human perfection. The young man still remained overwhelmed by his vision of her. She had appeared in the double majesty of power and beauty. Anne possessed all that could fascinate and bind a heart full of enthusiasm, and overflowing with the tenderness of youth. She was a Queen, she was a woman! The Cavalier disregarded what might have appeared shocking or compromising in the situation. In his veneration, he had instantly cast aside any thought that this man might be the lover of Anne of Austria. A Queen of France has no lover!

And, after all, was not all sufficiently accounted for by the presence of Claire, of that young girl who in his eyes symbolized innocence and purity? The kiss printed on her forehead by the gentleman, the moment after leaving the arms of the Queen, purified all! Also, for some reason, this handsome, distinguished, valiant nobleman did not in the least embody the young soldier's conception of the successful lover. He lacked vigor. This impression became stronger in his mind each time he looked at the stranger.

As we have seen, the Cavalier, dreaming of fortune and adventure, thought of everything except danger. And yet, danger was approaching. It raced toward him, swift as the galloping steeds of His Eminence's guardsmen, impetuous as the brave officer who led them.

After passing Arcueil, M. Bernard suddenly slowed down. He seemed tired. There was an ominous pallor in his face, drawn with fatigue.

The Cavalier, surprised, brought his horse to a quick stop, and asked:

"What has happened, Monsieur? You seem to suffer."

"It's nothing, nothing at all," his companion hastened to reply; but his altered voice belied his words. "Just a slight fatigue. We have still a long journey ahead of us, and it might be wise to rest a moment."

He tried bravely to smile, but this smile came only with great effort.

"Would it be indiscreet to ask where we are going?"

"To Dampierre! We shall change horses there before taking the eastern highway. Thus we can escape going through Paris and its immediate environs, where we run a great risk of being recognized."

"How far is it from here to Dampierre?"

"Eighteen miles!"

"Can you do it without stopping?"

"We must!" answered the gentleman.

He was obviously trying to make his beautiful voice sound determined.

"Yet you seem tired and in pain," said the young man with solicitude, drawing closer to him.

But his eyes suddenly were riveted on his companion's saddle, which was stained with large brown spots. He started, and cried:

"Why, Monsieur, you are wounded!"

The other seemed quite alarmed, but answered:

"No, no, it's all right. An old wound. It must have opened on the journey. It's just a small cut on the leg."

"The motion of riding may irritate the wound. You must dress it. I'll help you."

The Cavalier had already put one foot on the ground. With a sudden gesture, the gentleman stopped him. Then, in a constrained tone of voice, he refused to accept the offer.

"I beg you, let us not waste any time. It's nothing, I tell you! A mere scratch. I shall dress it at Dampierre."

Impatient at this delay and anxious to end these embarrassing questions, M. Bernard started his horse off at a quick pace. The young soldier was forced to mount and follow after his obstinate companion.

From this moment, however, their pace did not exceed a trot. M. Bernard tried to appear cheerful, but every jerk of the horse seemed to increase his fatigue. The Cavalier did not take his eyes off his companion's face, and kept as near as possible to him.

Continuing in this manner, they passed through Bourg-la-Reine. The town was scarcely awake, but their passage aroused some wonder in the one or two early risers who saw them.

Tancrède looked around. They were not being followed. It was possible to take their time without running any great danger. They were still in sight of the last houses of the village and passing the château of Gabrielle d'Estrée, when the Cavalier again became alarmed. His companion had once more turned pale. He seemed to be suffering deeply. Obviously his pain was increasing. Suddenly he swayed, and then regained control of himself for a last effort.

Luckily the Cavalier had not ceased to watch him. He held out his arm at once, and supported the feeble, almost inert, body of the wounded man. Still holding him, the Cavalier managed to slip off his horse, and helped his companion to the ground. But this last effort had consumed all the strength of the unfortunate man. The Cavalier felt him collapse in his arms as he stretched him out on a little slope beside the road. M. Bernard had fainted.

"*Morbleu!*" swore the young man, whose respectful admiration for the man had vanished. "*Morbleu!* These dainty court noblemen are like weak women. Imagine a soldier ever doing that! And this man wanted to gallop along the highway!"

This half-humorous monologue did not keep him from rendering aid to his companion. He took his scarf and dipped it in the clear water of a stream. Then, returning to the wounded man, he pushed aside his curls, which were like silk to his touch, and bathed his forehead with the cold water.

In spite of his attentions, the gentleman showed no signs of life.

"The devil take these gallants!" muttered the Cavalier. "These court dandies have no more than enough strength to embrace their beautiful ladies."

But he kept up his attempts to revive the man. He first unbuckled his sword-belt, then loosened his doublet, so as to give the gentleman a little more air. With a gesture of impatience, he tore open the top of the shirt.

Suddenly he jumped up with a start, and fell back several paces.

"*Morbleu!* It was that, then!"

With troubled eye and trembling hands, he remained fixed on the spot, as if he had just committed some sacrilege. So there was but too much excuse for his companion's peculiarities; for the effeminate air, the strange musical voice, the soft features, the slenderness of body, and even this last collapse.

To think that he had accused this hardy spirit of weakness! *Peste!* The explanation of this weakness was there, conclusive, before his eyes.

"By my star! What a climax! So M. Bernard is a woman!"

Nervously, the Cavalier began to laugh.

"A woman! And I thought her an admirer of the Queen and of Mlle. de Cernay. I was right in considering those kisses of no consequence!"

Suddenly the lovely rider reopened her eyes. The sparkling morning air had revived her. She saw everything at once, and her energy seemed to return. She quickly pulled herself together, looked questioningly at the young man who had been so innocently indiscreet.

Still troubled by his inadvertent discovery, the Cavalier threw himself to his knees in the road, and seizing his companion's hand with chivalrous gentleness, brought it to his lips, crying:

"Madame, whoever you are, rest assured of one thing! I swear to forget this secret, of which an unfortunate accident put me in possession."

She smiled, amused, in spite of everything, by the strangeness of her adventure. The Cavalier continued ardently:

"Yes, I give you my word to serve you, the friend of Her Majesty and of Mlle. de Cernay as if you were indeed a man. Until you yourself care to make a change, you will remain to me a man whose safety is entrusted to my sword. I wish to know nothing else. You are to me M. Bernard!"

Reassured by this vehement outburst, and, perhaps, still amused by the novelty of the situation in which she found herself, the lady smiled.

"In all faith," she said simply, "I prefer the present arrangement. Come, Cavalier, help M. Bernard complete his toilet."

The young man hastened to perform what services he could. The lady looked with interest at the figure of her frank, loyal servant. The great care he took in helping her induced her to compliment him, somewhat ironically:

"Why, you're not too clumsy, for a soldier. You would make quite a passable lady's maid."

The joke did not please the Cavalier.

"I hope that I shall be able to fill, in your service, other offices more worthy of a man and of a soldier," he answered proudly.

"What an ungallant reply, Cavalier. Who knows, perhaps some day you will tell with pride how you once helped the Duchess of Chevreuse with her toilet, on the highway to Spain."

The Cavalier had finished his task. At the sound of that famous name, he remained thunderstruck.

What! Could *that* be Mme. de Chevreuse! Could *she* be the woman who, it was said, was as strong as a man, that Amazon who personified revolt and audacity! Was *she* the great Duchess, the enemy of the Cardinal, the nightmare of the King, the demon of independence and the soul of intrigue? She was there, in front of him! Overwhelmed, the young soldier bowed low.

"But, look!" said the great lady, turning. "What is wrong with the horses? They seem restless."

Indeed, their steeds, which the Cavalier had tied to a tree on the side of the road, showed great signs of impatience. Their nostrils, turned in the direction of Paris, were quivering. They pawed the ground, shook their bridles, and began to neigh.

Fearing the worst, the Cavalier rushed up the slope of the bank, and looked down the road. Above the wall of the park he saw a cloud of dust. It was only the height of the wall that kept their pursuers from sight.

"Quick, Madame!" he cried, rushing down the slope. "Quick! We are followed!"

The Duchess trembled.

"Followed!" she exclaimed. "It's impossible."

A low rumble was the only answer. There was no mistaking that sound. A troop of horsemen was approaching.

"To horse and away, Cavalier!"

"Alas, Madame, it is too late. We could not go a mile without being overtaken."

She listened, panting. The sound of clattering hoofs came nearer.

"You're right! How can we get away from here?"

"Leave it to me, Madame. Mount and continue on the road without looking back."

"What are you going to do?"

"Stay here, and cover your retreat. You must ride on as quickly as possible. Turn off into the forest of Verrières by the first cross-road. As for me, I promise to hold them at bay here until you shall have had time to get away."

"I can't think of it!" exclaimed the Duchess, watching him draw his sword. "You will let yourself be killed."

"Madame, have not your life and liberty been entrusted to me?"

"No, no! Not at the cost of yours!"

"Come," smiled the Cavalier, "I'm beginning to believe you think me useful only as a lady's maid!"

The Duchess hesitated. The danger was fast drawing near, and only a few moments were left.

She suddenly made up her mind:

"It would be a useless sacrifice. I do not accept it. Within an hour they would overtake me, after passing over your body. My strength may fail me again. Now that they are on my trail, they'll never give up!"

"Will you place yourself at their mercy, then?"

"Do not worry! My life is more precious to them than my body. They will not dare to harm me!"

CHAPTER XIX

TWO OLD ENEMIES MEET

A SUDDEN frown wrinkled the brow of the Duchess. The thought of a much more serious danger had struck her.

"But," she added, seizing the young man's arm with her nervous fingers, "but, I have papers here which our enemies would give anything to possess. They must not, in any circumstances, fall into their hands."

Feverishly, she drew a package from her saddle-bag.

"At any cost, we must save that, or all will be lost! It means human lives! The only hope for success! All is at stake there! Take it!"

She extended the packet to him. He drew back, fearing to understand.

"Listen to me carefully, Cavalier. Above all, obey me in every detail. It is you who must fly.

"Leave you? Never!"

"Do you begin so soon to question my orders? You must do this. I rely upon your courage and your skill. Take *Capitan*, my best horse. Leave at once and head straight for the eastern post-road. You should arrive safely at Sedan."

"At Sedan?"

"This packet you will deliver to the Count of Soissons. You will wait eight days for me. If, at the end of that time, I have not arrived, it means that fate has decided against me."

"Oh, Madame!"

"In that case you will return again to France, with the Count's answer, which you must deliver to the Queen."

"Through Mlle. de Cernay?"

"Yes, through her! She will give you the message of the Count, when it has been signed by Her Majesty."

"And this royal message?"

"Mlle. de Cernay will tell you where and how to deliver it to me, if I am still free."

"If you are free?" repeated Tancrède with emotion.

"If I am not, you must take the message to London."

"To London?"

"To Lord Montague."

"Very well, Madame," said the Cavalier, now reconciled to his duty. "I obey. The packet will be given to the Count, at Sedan; the answer, to the Queen, and her Majesty's message to Lord Montague in London. Or, rather, I trust, to you yourself."

"Thank you, Cavalier. You will never know how much you have done for me. Ah, wait one instant!"

Mme. de Chevreuse put on his finger the gold ring which he had already used once as a means of identification.

"This ring will be your protection, Cavalier, and will also serve as an introduction to the Count. Go, now, and be prudent."

Then, as the young soldier seemed to remain fixed to the spot, unable to abandon his companion in such a crisis, she pushed him toward his horse, saying:

"Come, courage, my friend. It takes more courage to avoid a battle than to face one."

Tears were in the Cavalier's eyes:

"Alas, can I leave you in their hands, *you*, Madame?"

"Oh, you leave me in the hands of God! Of God?—or of Monsieur the Cardinal! which is not quite the same thing," concluded the noble but skeptical Duchess to herself.

The Cavalier jumped upon *Capitan*. The ominous sound of the galloping horsemen drew near. They were about to pass the wall which had kept our friends hidden from their sight.

"Two miles from here," said Mme. de Chevreuse hastily, "is Croix-de-Berny. After the Belle-Epine you will pass Choisy-le-Roy, then, by the way of Saint-Maur and Villiers you will reach the eastern highway. Take care of *Capitan*, he is a friend. Farewell, Cavalier!"

"Good-bye, Madame."

With heart beating furiously, his throat aching with suppressed agony, the young man saluted his companion. Then, at the final sign from her, he touched the horse with his spurs, and, regretfully, was on his way.

"At last," sighed the Duchess, as she saw him disappear at a furious gallop. "It was hard to persuade him! What a charming youth."

Now, again calm, a defiant smile on her lips, she prepared to receive the newcomers.

"And now, my dear Cardinal, we are to meet after all."

At the end of the wall of the park, the troop of horsemen dashed into view. At the sight of this handsome gentleman, standing alone in the middle of the road, they rushed forward with increased speed. In a few seconds they reached the spot, and encircled the Duchess.

The leader of the troop sprang quickly from his horse. Hat in hand, he advanced toward the solitary horseman. The latter awaited his arrival with complete equanimity, arms crossed, and face hidden by the brim of a large hat.

"Monsieur," he said, "be kind enough to give me your sword. In the name of the King, I arrest you."

Without a hint of resistance, or a moment's hesitation, the prisoner handed over the sword to the Musketeer.

"Will you be kind enough to tell me, Monsieur, into whose hands I am entrusting my sword?"

"Lieutenant d'Artagnan, of the King's Musketeers."

The prisoner shuddered.

"D'Artagnan! Ah, but . . ."

And the Gascon thought he heard her lips murmur three names that struck his ear like a bolt from the blue:

"Porthos, Athos, Aramis!"

He looked carefully at his mysterious prisoner, whose face was still hidden.

"I am at your service, M. d'Artagnan."

"Then, Monsieur, be kind enough to mount your horse; we have orders to conduct you to Berny."

"To Berny!"

The lieutenant detected a slight quiver, quickly suppressed, in the stranger's voice.

"The place does not please you?"

"Yes, yes! Only I beg you to go slowly."

"You are not well?"

"Not altogether. I am just recovering from an illness that somewhat handicaps me."

"Allow me, then, to help you on your horse."

While rendering this service, d'Artagnan continued to scrutinize his prisoner. For one instant he was able to catch a glimpse of the face. This glance was sufficient for the keen eye of the Musketeer. Bowing low, he said with a slight smile:

"I understand, Madame la Duchess, and am entirely at your service. We shall go as slowly as it will please you to command."

Turning to the horsemen, he said:

"We will advance at a walk, gentlemen!"

Riding by his side, at the head of the troop, the Duchess looked at him.

"So you recognized me?" she asked after a moment's hesitation, and with a shade of vexation in her voice.

"Could d'Artagnan ever forget the kind friend of Aramis?"

"And yet *you* made me prisoner! A strange way to demonstrate your friendliness!"

The Musketeer bit his lip:

"Alas, madame, I had my orders. A soldier knows no other law. *Dura lex* . . ."

"*Sed lex*, yes, I know! So you are in the service of the Cardinal?"

"I remain in the service of the King!"

"Ah, indeed! And it was the King who ordered you to seize me?"

The Gascon blushed, and made no answer. He looked around at his men to make sure that this dialogue was not overheard. The guards, fortunately, followed at some distance, talking to one another.

"Well, well," continued the Duchess ironically, "at the next opportunity I shall repeat this pleasant little tale to the Chevalier d'Herblay. I have no doubt that he will be enchanted, and will send you his compliments."

The Musketeer, deeply wounded, replied:

"In that case, madame, you might have the kindness to tell him that I performed my duty strictly, but with courtesy and moderation. That will undoubtedly increase his satisfaction."

"Alas, Monsieur d'Artagnan, what worse thing could you have done than this? How would you have treated your mortal enemy?"

D'Artagnan leaned nearer to her, and said in a low tone:

"Why, I might have asked *him*, madame, his reason for wanting to go so slowly."

Mme. de Chevreuse shivered. She looked straight into the calm, smiling eyes of the Gascon.

"What do you mean?" she asked anxiously.

"One moment, madame. I might also have asked him what had become of the young soldier who accompanied him from the Carmelites, and whom I do not now see."

"You know . . . ?"

"Nothing, madame, nothing!" declared the Musketeer with a noble gesture. "I was instructed to seize M. Bernard. You are M. Bernard; I have arrested you. My duty has been performed! I have no interest in anything else."

Impressed by his consideration, the Duchess of Chevreuse thanked her gallant adversary with a smile.

"Do not forget, I beg of you, to mention that to M. Aramis," insisted the lieutenant, more wounded than he wished to appear. "That dear friend, I feel convinced, would hold no grudge against me."

"Ah, you are still the same M. d'Artagnan!"

The little hand of the lady pressed that of the lieutenant in thanks.

Thenceforward, they rode side by side without exchanging another word. Both of them were recalling past memories.

When, a quarter of an hour later, they reached Croix-de-Berny, the Cavalier had passed through long before. *Capitan* must by this time have galloped past Choisy-le-Roi, and turned to the right onto the eastern post-road.

NEAR Croix-de-Berny was a little pavilion used as a lodge by hunting parties, and as a resting place by the carriages on their way to the princely estates that lay in this direction: the houses of Villebon, of Dampierre (which belonged to the Chevreuse family), and of Limours (one of the estates of the Duke of Orléans).

It was to this pavilion that d'Artagnan led the Duchess—or, rather, M. Bernard, for the Musketeer, respecting the great lady's incognito, continued to treat her as a man.

Beneath her bold and haughty exterior, the Duchess was deeply agitated. She was disturbed by the secrecy of her arrest. It was clear that her enemies had been on her trail since her stay at Barbette's, and yet they had let her remain free to meet the Queen at the Carmelites. They gave her every freedom in leaving Paris, and it was not until she was outside the city that she had been seized.

Obviously, they wished the Queen to be dragged into the affair, and had left her free that that might be accomplished. But those who arrested her must still believe her some unknown stranger under the vague name of M. Bernard. What were the sinister machinations behind this diabolical plan? She could not at all recognize the hand of her relentless adversary, the Cardinal, who dealt mighty blows which struck like cannon-balls. There was something insinuating, hidden, underhanded about it all.

But the courageous woman who had dared so much was not one to despair. Thanks to the devotion of the Cavalier, she had been able to rid herself of the compromising papers. That was most important of all. The kindness of Aramis' friend reassured her. Through the Musketeer's "blindness" the young man had been able to make a safe departure. The Cavalier had escaped the one great danger—that of being taken at the same time that she was. Tancrède was a newcomer in Paris. Except for his friends only d'Artagnan knew of his presence, and the Musketeer pretended to know nothing of him. All was well on that side. The flight to Sedan had commenced under happy auspices.

Even suppose the Cardinal decided to do his worst, and confine her in some prison, this blow would be as ineffectual as a sword-stroke in water. Were the Duchess to disappear, her work would still be carried on. The machine that she had set in action when she gained the Queen's support would fulfil its task, would, in the end, crush the enemy. Even if she were to die, she would survive in three friends who were faithful even beyond death: the Cavalier, whose love for Claire de Cernay she had already divined; Lord Montague, the most faithful of her admirers; and, finally, Claire.

Claire! A mysterious bond attached her to this lovely girl. The Queen's attendant was an orphan, and was bound body and soul to Madame de Chevreuse whom she considered her benefactress. The kind Duchess had had the girl educated in a convent. She was all that Mademoiselle de Cernay possessed in the way of relatives. Yes, Claire loved her. Mme. de Chevreuse had discovered that in these recent days of common peril. She felt the profound and tender love in the heart of this young girl, a love that was far above mere friendship. The instinctive love of daughter for mother!

Yes! the Duchess could await her pitiless adversary without fear. Although her hand might seem much the weaker in this game which two clever players were about to begin, Mme. de Chevreuse still held several winning cards.

The sound of wheels and horses' hoofs on the road broke into these reflections. Through a small barred window she saw a carriage draw up in front of the house. A man jumped out quickly. He had a handsome oval face, framed with silky hair, and a goat-like beard; a clear complexion, with that transparent color so common to people of southern races, and soft eyes, full of subdued fire.

Was this insinuating gentleman the person whom the Cardinal had put upon her track? At such an idea, the Duchess made a wry face.

But a second traveller descended from the carriage. Slowly and deliberately, he stepped out with the tired air of an old man, or of an invalid. He rested his hand on his companion's shoulder. Together they advanced toward the pavilion.

For a moment the invalid raised his head, and the Duchess could not keep from shuddering. Her lips formed the name:

"Richelieu!"

In spite of her hatred and her present danger, Mme. de Chevreuse could not restrain a gesture of pity for this enemy. He who had been so fierce and terrible now appeared to be a broken man, burned out before his time by the flame of his anger and his emotions.

She heard low voices outside the door.

"Yes, Monseigneur, the prisoner is here," d'Artagnan was saying.

"The thing was done without a disturbance?" murmured an unctuous voice.

The dry voice of the Cardinal cut in.

"Come, that makes no difference. The stroke succeeded, which is the important matter."

The door opened, and Richelieu appeared. He came alone, holding himself erect by a great effort of will. Approaching the prisoner, he bowed gallantly:

"Madame, I am delighted to have an opportunity to pay my respects."

Forgetting her disguise, M. Bernard made a full curtsey:

"And I, Monseigneur, deem it a pleasure to greet Your Eminence again."

Richelieu pointed to an arm-chair.

"Be kind enough to be seated, Duchess. We must talk a bit, and doubtless the rough road has tired you."

He took a second chair, opposite her, and so placed it that he could remain in a shadow, whereas the Duchess faced the light of the window.

"Ouf!" he groaned, sitting down. "Thirty years of service are a long time. Never have I felt them so much as today—and never have I had more reason to regret them."

He supported this compliment by kissing the hand of the Duchess.

"Do you realize, madame, that we have not seen each other for fifteen long years? To see you makes me doubt the passage of time, and feel young again."

"Oh, Your Eminence has no need of the Fountain of

Youth. I have never seen you look more vigorous than today."

The Duchess accompanied this doubtful compliment with an unpleasant smile. The Cardinal pretended not to notice the irony. He went on, as if speaking to himself:

"Fifteen years! How much time has been lost! Fortunately, it is never too late!

"The truth is," he continued in a stronger voice, "I have never lost sight of you. If misfortune and the force of circumstances have obliged us to remain separated from each other, I have never allowed myself to remain without news of you."

"I thank Your Eminence, and am deeply touched by such persistent attention."

"Also, you see, you had scarcely entered the country but my one desire was to meet you, and talk to you a little in all frankness and friendship."

"And now this desire is fulfilled, Monseigneur!"

The minister was like a cat treading on padded paws, and playing delicately with his prisoner, as would a cat with a mouse. But this honeyed introduction gave warning of an approaching spring.

"Tell me, Duchess, in all truth, don't you really feel that your exile is becoming wearisome?"

"Now we come to the point," thought Mme. de Chevreuse.

However, instead of answering, she settled herself more comfortably in her chair, waiting for her opponent to give an opening before she began her attack.

Richelieu shook his head slightly. He remembered being forced into such a silence many a time. Whether impudence or modesty, it was essentially feminine diplomacy.

"Does not this wandering existence seem to you unbecoming a princess of your rank and family?" he insisted. "How unworthy of the brilliant qualities of your mind and of your heart! How foolishly are these qualities used, without profit to the State or to yourself!"

"Let us come to the point, Monseigneur. I did not desire this life. I have endured it."

"Come now, you had only to choose another one—much more profitable and glorious."

The Duchess answered proudly:

"One does not choose one's destiny! One cannot escape from commands that come from the Almighty! The best one can do is to show courage, fidelity, and honor in whatever position heaven has placed one."

Richelieu shrugged his shoulders imperceptibly.

"You are a fatalist, madame! Destiny only enchains weak spirits. Determination can change the course of events. There are certain occasions when fortune offers opportunities. The skilful profit by them; the negligent let them slip by."

"Does Your Eminence mean to infer that such a time is at hand?"

"Perhaps!"

"Explain your meaning, Monseigneur."

"It is for you to divine it, madame. Let us speak frankly. Up to this time we have not been particularly good friends. Is the fault mine? I think not. Do you remember, Duchess, that on a certain day, sixteen years ago, this hand was extended to you?"

"I have not been able to forget it!"

"Then you must remember the outrageous manner in which you spurned that offer of friendship?"

"I was young then . . ."

"Yes, madame. You were young, and you had friends who were not mine."

"It is true, Monseigneur."

"You were in the wrong, perhaps. Would not another answer from you have avoided many hatreds, and prevented many misfortunes? I ask you now: these friends, where are these friends?"

In making this remark, the prime minister looked at his old enemy with a chilling smile. She, overcome by many bitter memories, hesitated a moment before answering:

"It is I who should ask this question of Your Eminence."

"They have disappeared. And with them old quarrels have died. Peace is made. At this hour nothing comes up to separate us any more."

"Does Your Eminence really believe that?"

"What can divide us, now that those who separated us no longer exist?"

In a low tone, the Duchess replied:

"Alas, Monseigneur, their memory exists—and the past."

It was now the Cardinal's turn to feel uncomfortable. These words of loyalty sounded like a death-knell in his ears. He spoke with some irritation:

"At your age does one still live on memories? Yesterday is dead; today alone matters—today and tomorrow. For you the present is war or peace. The future you may decide for yourself: perpetual exile, or a return to an existence worthy of you. Understand me well. Your brilliant qualities are now wasted on petty intrigues, in the service of lost causes and of persons unable to understand your genius. You now have the opportunity to devote them to the service of the State, to work for a great goal, on a vast stage."

"If I venture to understand, Your Eminence is offering me a chance to become your ally?"

"Yes!" said the Cardinal, simply.

"And, suppose I accept, I am assured of your mercy?"

"Absolutely!"

"Then only one other thing would have to be done: obtain pardon from a second person."

"To whom do you refer?"

"Your Eminence may, in his magnanimity, forget long struggles, cruel memories, spilled blood! But there is another person whose anger is, perhaps, more tenacious, and who, not being in the service of the Church, cannot forgive offences so easily."

"You mean the King?"

"His Majesty, yes."

The Cardinal made a gesture of disdain.

"I guarantee his forgiveness."

"The King has changed a great deal?" asked the Duchess with irony.

"No, madame, His Majesty has remained the same. But circumstances have changed. My dear Duchess, we are alone and can talk in a straightforward manner. Of course, the King hates you. You know from what day that hatred dates and what its motive is."

Instinctively, Mme. de Chevreuse prepared for the struggle. She realized that the conversation had arrived at the point to which the Cardinal wished to bring it. Lowering her eyes, weighing carefully each word, calcuating each gesture, she answered:

"I believe I know, Monseigneur. His Majesty thinks that I have an evil influence on the Queen. He blamed my influence for imputed actions which were laid to his royal consort and which lessened the dignity of his authority."

The Cardinal nodded his head:

"If there had been nothing but that, you would already have been pardoned. The King does not worry much over such slips. No, it is not those shortcomings that he holds against the Queen and you."

"Indeed? Then, really I do not know . . ."

"What suffers in the King is the man rather than the monarch! The King is more jealous of his honor as a husband than of his glory as a sovereign. Well, the King believes that a grave blow was struck at that honor. It is this secret wound that for sixteen years has tortured him. It is this suspicion of infidelity which infuriates him. If he hates you, it is from that alone that his hatred arises."

"These suspicions are unjust."

"I should like to believe so, for the honor of Their Majesties."

"Nothing has ever happened to confirm them."

"Up to the present, no!"

"I beg Your Eminence not to take offence at this question, but would these suspicions have lasted such a long time unless some interested person had desired to keep this devouring flame alive?"

The Cardinal suddenly arose. This cruel blow had struck home, for he seized the hand of Mme. de Chevreuse, and cried in a voice full of emotion:

"I do not believe that that is true. There was a time, it is true, when, for the sake of public interest, it was considered advisable not to allow the Queen to gain too much influence over her husband. But now, Her Majesty having given birth to an heir to the throne, it is the duty of every faithful subject not to separate the King and Queen, but to unite them. In that lies the safety of the State."

The Duchess understood. It was only necessary to change one word to express the real thought of the prime minister: "In that is *my* safety," he meant to say.

"Am I then the dove of peace whom Your Eminence has chosen?" she asked with feigned surprise.

"Madame, I am speaking seriously. You can help to bring Their Majesties together. The first step is to cure the King of his suspicions."

"Will you give me the means to do so?"

"Yes. You will prove to him that they were ill-founded. We, you and I together, can do this, if you are willing."

Richelieu had come nearer to her. His voice, formerly sharp and impassioned, had become soft and insinuating. The Duchess was afraid. She felt that it must be dire necessity which had forced the pitiless Cardinal to subject his pride to such conduct. But she understood his position. Abandoned by all, no longer certain of the support of the King, the prime minister was now seeking the Queen's support. And it was upon Marie de Chevreuse that he depended for obtaining the Queen's favor.

"I do not understand," she said. "How shall we prove to the King the Queen's innocence, if his heart does not cry out the truth?"

"We can, I tell you—on one condition!"

"What?"

"Above all I desire to have—I *must* have from Her Majesty and from you—a pledge, a definite proof of friendship and alliance."

The Duchess thought she understood, and drew back in terror.

"And this pledge . . . ?" she gasped.

"It is, from the Queen, a sincere confession of her past mistakes."

"And from me?"

"From you . . . a written statement, containing the truth, all the truth, and signed by your hand."

A cry of horror escaped from the pale lips of Mme. de Chevreuse. So that was the proposal! That she should betray the Queen, her friend! At that price they would receive her into favor again, and would reconcile Anne of Austria and the King. This royal pardon would be accorded to both of them: to the Queen, at the price of her humiliation; to the Duchess, as her reward for betrayal.

Marie de Chevreuse made these reflections in less time than it has taken us to set them down. The proud blood of the Rohans in her veins began to boil.

"You dare," she cried in an outburst of passion, "you dare to suspect the Queen! You believe her guilty?"

Richelieu smiled coldly:

"She is—you know it better than any one."

"I? Good God, no, no! I know nothing. A lie, I tell you!"

"Let us not become involved in useless protestations . . . Have you forgotten, then, the memory of a certain meeting at night, in a garden, between two gentlemen and two ladies?"

"A falsehood!"

"Come, I must refresh your memory. The date, first: April 20, 1624; the place: the garden of the Château of Amiens; the names of the gentlemen: Lord Montague and His Grace the Duke of Buckingham; the names of the ladies: the Duchess of Chevreuse and the . . ."

"You lie!"

"Oh, nonsense! Do you intend to deny your presence and that of the gentlemen? I possess the proof of it!"

"Perhaps! But against her you have nothing. The Queen was not in the garden of Amiens!"

"Who then was the fair-haired lady present?"

The Duchess lowered her eyes, and murmured:

"Oh, Monseigneur, have mercy . . ."

"Her name?"

"The secret is not mine alone."

"Why, woman, haven't you even the courage to keep up the pretence to the end!"

The Duchess, crushed, sank back into the chair. The Cardinal sat down again opposite her, and said, sweetly:

"Why deny anything, since I know all?"

"Well, Monseigneur, what do you want of me?"

"The proof which is lacking."

She looked at him steadily, surprised.

"Yes," he continued vehemently, "the proof, for proof there is. I have been seeking it for a long time. Its possession would bring me the Queen's confidence. It alone would allow me to be noble and magnanimous, to prove to my sovereign that, holding in my hands her honor and her life, I intended to spare her, to save her . . ."

"At what a price!" murmured the Duchess.

"Ah! You have guarded your secret well. I had almost given up hope of ever discovering it. But recently there have been several indications that assure me of its existence, material and tangible in form."

Mme. de Chevreuse, alarmed, looked up.

"I do not hold it yet, but I am nearer to it. And I tremble—yes, I tremble. This living, indisputable proof of the royal transgression may escape from me again. It may fall into other hands—even those of the King!"

"Oh, never, never!" exclaimed the Duchess, covering her face with her hands.

"At last, then, you understand me! Yes, his anger would be terrible, the explosion devastating. The flood might sweep over all of us, and overwhelm us. Do you desire this? Think of the bottomless abyss, of the gulf of despair and of shame, into which your Queen, your dearest friend, would sink!"

"Alas, can I only save her by betraying her!" thought Mme. de Chevreuse with horror.

The Cardinal understood her thought from the expression on her face.

"Come!" he said, "you understand now. I alone can guarantee safety."

"What must be done?"

"Help me to find this proof, and tell me the entire truth."

"Is that all?"

"I believe so. You will write a frank, sincere statement which you will sign . . ."

"And the Queen countersign?"

"Yes! At that price, I grant you my support, and guarantee the pardon of the King!"

The Duchess, her fingers clinging to the arms of her chair, arose defiantly. Withering the Cardinal with her haughty look, she cried:

"My answer is, no! Rather war with all its risks, all its perils. I will not betray my Queen. I will not sell her to you. She shall not sign her death-warrant with her own hand!"

"Take care!" said the Cardinal menacingly. "I know where you were last night, madame. Do you think your disguise could keep you out of my sight? I know whom you have just seen, and what you forced from her, by making use of that secret which you refuse to divulge to me. If it is to be war, if you snatch from me once more the support of the Queen—woe to you and to her!"

"You are threatening your sovereign?"

By a violent effort Richelieu was able to preserve his cool self-control:

"For the last time, I offer you peace."

"At the price of betrayal!"

"Without you, remember, I can discover this secret."

"Seek it then, Monseigneur! For it is not I who will sell it to you!"

"Ha, you will never be anything but an adventuress!" he said, curling his lips in disdain.

"An adventuress? So be it! I accept the title. At least I shall not dishonor myself as much in that career as in the one you offer me. A spy and a traitor!"

Shaking with a new rage, the Cardinal seized her hand.

"You forget, madame, that you are at my mercy!"

"I know it, Monseigneur."

"That I can deliver you over to the justice of the King! You, who dared to disregard your banishment, to return from exile again to undermine the heart of your unfortunate sovereign."

"Do you think so, Monseigneur? His Majesty might ask why there was so much mystery surrounding the seizure of this banished woman. Why was she left free to see that Queen whom she was going to undermine? And he might be interested in the bargain that was offered her during a secret interview in a secluded lodge. The King is suspicious. He might be curious to know what conspiracy could bring together the Duchess of Chevreuse and the Cardinal-Duke de Richelieu!"

His threat having failed, the prime minister again resumed his calm manner:

"I can avoid any disturbance. No one is aware of your arrest. Even the guardsmen are ignorant of your real name. To them you are some conspirator or adventurer seized on the highway—a M. Bernard."

The Duchess shivered.

"Who then will be interested in the arrest of M. Bernard? Who will care what happens to him?"

"I know! You can assassinate me with impunity."

"Oh, nonsense! Kill you, and why? Don't I have very discreet places which are as effective as the tomb? Places which one never leaves after entering?"

Despite her pluck, Mme. de Chevreuse turned pale. Was her incognito going to be fatal? Would "M. Bernard" prove her undoing? However, she controlled her nerves sufficiently to answer:

"Praise be to heaven, I have plenty of friends who will ask what has become of the Duchess of Chevreuse. The Queen . . ."

"The Queen will remain silent. For her to speak would be to betray herself."

"Your followers may be less discreet."

"I have them at my mercy."

"There may be some among them who have a heart. Suppose one of the guards should have recognized me!"

The Cardinal looked at her coldly:

"Then, I am very sorry for him!"

The Duchess was about to mention d'Artagnan. This threat stopped the words. She bit her lip to keep the name of the Musketeer from escaping her.

"You see now, you are at my mercy. At first I begged you, instead of commanding or threatening. It was because I wanted to possess this secret of your own free will, and not to drag it from you by fear or violence."

"Violence! Monseigneur, you know full well that there is no fear in the world that can open my lips. Except for God, Marie de Rohan fears no one!"

"It is you who have decided," answered the Cardinal. "The die is cast."

He sat down, dejected, before the table, and, with a trembling hand, started to write. At this moment the door was quietly pushed ajar. The smiling gentleman who had been the first to descend from the carriage slipped in noiselessly through the opening. As soon as he entered he saluted the prisoner with a quiet nod of the head, and smiled graciously. Then, with a sly wink, he mysteriously put a finger to his lips. This swift pantomime so amazed Mme. de Chevreuse that she could scarcely believe her eyes.

Without more ado, the gentleman glided forward to the table, and, bowing before the prelate, whispered several words in his ear. The Cardinal suddenly straightened up. An angry frown appeared on his brow. The Duchess saw him look at her with a furious, enraged glance. He rose and started to pace the floor with an air of indecision.

What could the newcomer have told him to cause such disturbance? There could be no doubt that the situation was assuming a new aspect. Each time the prime minister turned his back to her, the strange gentleman seized the opportunity to renew his mysterious signals. Suddenly the Cardinal stopped in front of her, and, looking at her with a searching glance, said in an angry tone:

"Last night, at the Carmelites, you did not go alone?"

Mme. de Chevreuse seemed stunned. Not knowing what answer to make she remained silent. The strange gentleman, however, motioned to her to answer in the affirmative. The Duchess, remembering that by this time the Cavalier was safely on his way, answered:

"It is true, Monseigneur, I was not unescorted."

Richelieu exchanged a glance with the newcomer, whose passive, reserved manner would not have led one to suspect his recent strange intervention.

"And your companion—a young soldier, I believe—knew your name? Your real name?"

The head of the strange gentleman nodded twice, a movement which clearly said: answer yes.

Without knowing why, the Duchess obeyed this suggestion and answered:

"Yes!"

An exclamation of vexation escaped from Richelieu. Now that his prisoner's name was known, he could no longer hope to hide her away under her false name. The risks were great if he arrested her as the Duchess of Chevreuse, and went through the publicity of a formal trial. The Queen was embittered, the King uncertain, and the conspirators would be driven through fear to extreme measures.

Swiftly, the Cardinal weighed the chances of such a move. Only his anger and pride still pushed him to violent extremes. The muscles of his face tightened as he struggled to control his passions. At last coming to a decision, with great reluctance he proceeded to tear up the order which he had been writing.

"My beautiful opponent," said the Cardinal with a forced smile, "I shall let you go. Remember, I held you at my mercy, and I gave you life and freedom!"

The Duchess did not altogether understand this sudden change. What new plot was hidden under such unexpected clemency? She glanced at the strange, insinuating newcomer. He continued stealthily his amazing pantomime.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan!" called the prime minister.

The Musketeer entered.

"Monsieur d'Artagnan, I entrust M. Bernard to your care. You will escort him to Boulogne by the most direct route. There you will see that he embarks on the next boat for England. You will take care, above all, that your prisoner holds no communication with anyone. You will answer for this with your head."

The Musketeer bowed without a sign of emotion.

Then Richelieu turned to the Duchess, who had been a passive spectator of the scene. He held out his hand to her:

"Remember," he said in a low voice as he touched his lips to her gloved hands, "as allies, we can save the Queen. As enemies, we may destroy her."

She appeared not to understand. He insisted:

"Think again of that proof, of that living witness which I may some day hold—tomorrow, perhaps."

This time he saw her tremble.

"Then, doubtless, you will repent of having scorned my offer. But it will be too late!"

Mme. de Chevreuse stood paralyzed. Finally she overcame her emotion, and answered in a fatalistic manner:

"That is in the hands of God!"

The master of France let go of the little hand, and, with a sigh of regret, walked slowly out of the pavilion. His enemy remained rooted to the spot, stupefied.

The insinuating gentleman profited by the prime minister's departure to approach her quickly.

"I hope, my dear Duchess," he whispered, "that you will be pleased to remember that it is to your humble servant that you owe your freedom, and that you will let this be known to Her Majesty the Queen."

He then, in his turn, took her hand, not to kiss it, but to insert there a small piece of folded paper. Before the Duchess could recover from her amazement, he had glided out as mysteriously as he had entered.

"Who in heaven's name is that man?" she asked d'Artagnan.

"Oh, he!" exclaimed the Musketeer with a disdainful shrug of the shoulders, "he's nobody! A certain M. Mazarin."

"What game is he playing?" she wondered to herself. "And what does he want of the Queen?"

A sudden thought entered her head:

"Where was this Mazarin during my conversation with the Cardinal?"

D'Artagnan smiled:

"At his usual place, just outside the door."

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, frightened. "He heard everything!"

Then, anxiously, she unfolded the paper. It was covered with an irregular handwriting, obviously disguised, like the uncertain letters made when one writes with the left hand.

She read:

If M. Bernard wishes to know what has become of a certain casket, left by him at Barbette's, a gentleman who takes an interest in him will let him know tonight.

"A casket?" she exclaimed. "A casket left by me at Barbette's? What does this mean? It must be some trap of this Mazarin's."

She continued to decipher the letter:

This casket is sealed with a star . . .

A star . . . ! The Duchess paused, deeply agitated.

The letter ended there, with one word written below as a signature. Mme. de Chevreuse turned pale as she read it. She tried to stop the wild beating of her heart with her hand. For this word was:

"REMEMBER."

Remember! The last cry of the dying Buckingham.

"The proof!" gasped the Duchess. "The tangible, material proof. The undeniable evidence—living! My God, help me!"

She quickly made up her mind.

"I shall see this Mazarin tonight."

The note contained a postscript:

On the pillar at the right as you leave the pavilion, write the name of the town where you will spend the night.

When questioned on this subject, d'Artagnan answered:

"If you wish, madame, we will make Saint-Germain our first stop. At *The Royal Oak* you will find pleasant quarters for the night."

They left the room together. But when d'Artagnan went ahead to examine their horses, the Duchess approached the pillar. With the aid of a half-burned piece of coal which she took from the ashes of the fireplace, she wrote these words:

Saint-Germain—The Royal Oak.

The Musketeer and his charge had scarcely departed before a man, dressed in a guardsman's uniform, slipped out of the shade of the forest and ran to the pillar. He examined it closely, and with great care rubbed out every trace of writing. He then jumped on his horse and overtook the carriage of the two statesmen.

Inside the carriage the defeated Richelieu was venting his wrath on his companion:

"That young soldier, the accomplice, must be found—you understand me, M. Mazarin?"

"Yes, Monseigneur, it shall be done!"

"To think that I had to let her go—*her!* Just when I had at last found her!"

"Ah, Your Eminence, it would have been dangerous and profitless to have hidden her away."

"But at least I should have had my revenge!"

"Revenge," murmured the Italian, "what good would it do?"

And in his own mind he added:

"*Toy* with them, *toy* . . . always! Never *destroy* them."

Richelieu, completely crushed, remained silent.

"Poor M. Richelieu," thought Mazarin with tender solicitude, "he's getting very old, very exhausted! Ah, by the Madonna di Fuoco, my turn will come soon!"

CHAPTER XX

A STRANGE TABLE COMPANION

The Cavalier Tancrède covered the few miles that separated the Orléans highway from the road to Rheims at a furious gallop.

Choisy-le-Roy, just awakening after its night's rest, saw with some bewilderment this phantom horseman rush by. He disregarded all obstacles as he raced through the narrow streets. Leaving on his left the Fontainebleau road, he crossed the Seine, then, without diminishing his whirlwind pace, reached the district of the Marne, in the centre of which was Saint-Maur and its forests. He crossed the river opposite Créteil, and then again at Joinville.

There, having put ten good miles and three streams between himself and any possible pursuers, he allowed himself a breathing space. It was about six in the morning. The sky was cloudless; the sun shone gaily, and the birds merrily welcomed the new day. The joy of living returned to the young horseman. He no longer felt that great agony which had been with him ever since he had been compelled to desert his brave friend, the Duchess of Chevreuse, at the moment of danger.

To reach Sedan and return, three things were essential:

prudence, a good horse, and money. As for prudence, the noble youth felt no lack of it. And, indeed, he was most clever at making good resolutions and establishing wise plans of action. But in an emergency, when some unexpected obstacle arose he was too likely to give way to his natural impetuosity. But, then, in extricating himself from difficulties, he had two precious assistants: his star—and, of even more value, his sword.

As for the second condition—a good horse—thanks to the foresight of the Duchess, he had one. She had given him the best of her mounts, *Capitan*, a spirited Spanish horse of fine blood, full of fire, and yet thoroughly dependable. The Cavalier felt that the horse, even after this fierce ride, was as fresh as when he left the stable. So, on this side, all went well.

The difficult question was that of money! The entire wealth of our soldier of fortune—what a mockery in that word *fortune!*—was contained in a little leather purse which rested lightly in his pocket. Alas, in it were more crowns than louis! Always prepared to look danger in the face, he drew out his purse, tantalizingly thin and meagre, and started to count his hoard. He made a wry face. Altogether, including pistoles, doubloons, louis d'or, crowns, and sous he only possessed a hundred French pounds—one hundred and twenty-five francs! If he allowed eight days for coming and going, and eight days for his stay in Sedan, he would have ten francs a day. Two crowns, only, for horse and rider!

The Cavalier patted *Capitan's* neck and whispered in his ear:

"My opinion, comrade, is that we shall not be travelling as becomes great noblemen. But don't be alarmed, I won't let you go short."

Then the young financier divided his money into fifteen parts, for the daily allowance. He still had two louis left which he tucked away carefully. This was his reserve fund! Having disposed of this matter to his liking, he started off again at a trot.

At about eleven o'clock the Cavalier entered Coulommiers. Both horse and rider needed several hours of rest and a good meal. A sleepless night, the excitement of the morning, and a long ride in the fresh air, had given the Cavalier an enormous appetite. He felt that he could teach even Saint-Amant a few tricks about eating.

At the entrance to the main street, Tancrède saw the sign-post of an inn, *The Shield of France. Capitan* pricked up his ears, smelled the pleasant odor of fresh hay, and turned toward this unexpected paradise. In the meantime the tantalizing aroma of food assailed the young man's nostrils, and made him look longingly at the open door.

The host, standing in the doorway, radiated health and joviality. He crossed his hands on his stomach, and with a welcoming smile beheld the approach of this important client, mounted on such a magnificent steed. As the Cavalier came near, he took off his white hat, and stepped aside to allow his entrance.

But with a twist of the reins, Tancrède had straightened the head of the horse. Sighing deeply, he withdrew his own eyes from the tempting vision. He passed the surprised inn-keeper, holding his head high in a haughty manner and affecting a supreme indifference. This was a piece of stoicism which *Capitan* could not understand, so the Cavalier felt he must explain:

"Comrade, you seem unaccustomed to self-sacrifice, and the question of money does not appear to worry you. Think a bit. You are no longer in the service of a great lady, rich, and, doubtless, lavish. So let's look for some little tavern which is more modest, and more in keeping with our means."

He traversed the street without seeing anything except a mediocre roadside inn frequented by wagoners. It was, indeed, modest,—to the point of humility. But this virtue, so much to be lauded in Christians, is much less appreciated in taverns. In spite of hunger and fatigue, the Cavalier curled his nose in disdain, and passed on. He found nothing but the highway, unfolding like a ribbon under the blazing sun.

Should he push forward when his bones ached and his stomach was empty? He must decide at once what was to be done. With mutual agreement, horse and rider stopped. There followed a short struggle in the Cavalier's mind—a struggle between his economical instinct which advised his return to the roadside inn, and his fierce appetite which desired the delicacies of the hostel. During this intimate tragedy in which logic and passion fought each other, *Capitan*, holding in slight esteem his new master, began to neigh in a dissatisfied manner.

The noble animal, accustomed to every luxury, had no desire to suffer the fate of Buridan's ass, which, as we all know, tortured by hunger and thirst equally, died between a bucket of water and a bundle of hay.

Finally, duty and logic won the fight in the Cavalier's stout heart. Deliberately, he directed the horse toward the wayside inn.

"Little food fits little fortune!" he murmured philosophically.

Yet five minutes later, the Cavalier made a dignified entry into the sumptuous grounds of *The Shield of France!* While passing the humble inn upon which he had finally decided, in a moment of distraction he forgot to turn to the left. *Capitan,* left to himself and quite ignorant of the worthy resolution of his master, went directly to the hospitable hostel. Oh, overwhelming victory of instinct over subtle reasoning!

A groom ran up to the new arrivals. In a lofty manner, like a man who realized his worth, the Cavalier threw the reins to the servant, and dismounted. He asked for the host, and in a grandiloquent manner ordered a feast worthy of his princely appetite. Having done this, he followed his mount to the stable, with the air of a great lord who does not like to confide to ordinary servants the care of a valuable horse.

"Carefully, carefully!" he cried to the groom, "very carefully. Take care of the animal as if it were a bride."

"Beautiful horse!" commented the groom, smacking his lips with the air of a connoisseur.

The Cavalier continuing his grand manner, said carelessly:

"The gift of a duchess!"

But to himself he said:

"My fine fellow, this gift will be your destruction. You have already eaten heavily into your reserve fund. So much the worse for it! Is it fitting that the Queen's messenger should travel after the manner of a churl! that he should join the company of wagoners! *Capitan* understands his position!"

And, as he was never without plenty of excuses, he concluded:

"Pah! Each day must take care of itself! We'll soon see if my star is to desert me."

In the meantime the groom had removed the saddle from the Duchess' horse with all the consideration due to a saddle of such noble origin.

"Does your honor wish to empty the holsters?" he asked as he threw the saddle upon a pile of hay.

"You're right!" said the Cavalier, as he knelt down in the straw. "I was about to forget that wise precaution."

The truth is, that in the haste of his flight, he had completely forgotten to examine the saddle. There might easily be there something of a compromising nature. From the right-hand holster he drew a pair of horse-pistols, which he examined with the eye of an expert. Splendid! They were choice weapons which might prove very useful. Putting the pistols in his belt, he examined the left-hand holster. It was filled with powder and ball.

"The Duchess thought of almost everything," commented the young soldier. "What a pity she forgot the one essential thing."

But he quickly corrected himself:

"For shame, Cavalier, that thought is unworthy of you. Better to eat roots along the road than seem to reduce your devotion to a financial basis!"

Having finished with the saddle, he passed to the portmanteau. Suddenly, in spite of his coolness, he let out a cry of surprise. The first thing he extracted was a bag filled to bursting, which, when dropped on the ground, gave out a most pleasant metallic sound.

Tears of joy sparkled in the young man's eyes:

"Dear Duchess, she anticipated everything, *even* that!"

He lifted the bag, and then smacked his lips.

"By my star, my noble protectress does things in a grand manner! Here I am, richer than Crœsus! And I thought to stop at an infamous little roadside tavern! Fie, fie, Cavalier—you forget that you are in the service of the Queen and of Mme. de Chevreuse! *Capitan* was much more sensible than you—perhaps he knew it all the time, the sly fox!"

In a fit of joy, he blew a kiss to his sagacious steed.

Then he cried in a most assured tone of voice:

"You there! Tell the host to come here!"

When the latter had come running up, he said:

"Add two bottles of your best Burgundy—your oldest. Go, my friend! And don't forget that I must be off in two hours."

The inn-keeper retired with the most profuse bows. After seeing that *Capitan* was fed and groomed with the greatest attention, the Cavalier began to think about his own needs. As he left the stable on his way to the dining-room, he had to stand aside to let the groom enter, leading by the bridle a mule.

"No doubt the mount of some other famished traveller," thought Tancrède.

And, indeed, in the middle of the court-yard, he saw the host deep in conversation with a large-bellied, jovial monk, dressed in the brown cowl of the begging friars of Saint Francis. At his approach, the Capuchin lowered his voice and looked at him carefully with a suspicious glance.

The young man was too hungry to pay any attention to this close examination. He called out gaily to the host:

"Well, my friend, what's the news from the kitchen? Is my dinner ready?"

"It awaits Your Excellency's pleasure."

"Capital! Don't keep it waiting—it might never forgive us."

The inn-keeper exchanged a glance with the jolly friar, and then, turning his back on him, hastened to guide his important guest towards the room in which the table was laid. Everything had been prepared on a grand scale. In the middle of the luxuriously appointed table, bottles flashed ruby and topaz while a carp *à la Vendôme* swam temptingly in its thick sauce. The Cavalier hastened to attack this dish, while he did not slight his host's wine. As soon as the first pangs of hunger had been assuaged, he examined his surroundings.

The room, with low ceiling and extremely dark, seemed quite large. Light came in through one window only.

This was near his table. Through it from where he sat he was able to see a part of the road by which he had come. Back of him a wooden stairway led to the floor above. At the end of the room was a large fireplace, in which a bundle of twigs was burning—an unnecessary comfort on this hot spring day. By the side of the chimney-place a little door opened into the kitchen. The only other door in the room was the one facing the court-yard, through which he had entered. Except for the corner in which he sat, the room was in deep shadow.

"A perfect place for a surprise attack!" he thought, half-serious, half-joking.

By a curious association of ideas, he suddenly thought of the Capuchin monk, and his suspicious appearance.

"Oh, well, I'm only a soldier rejoining his regiment. There, in my pocket, is a valid leave of absence, bearing the signature of M. de Gassion. I can safely pass the most severe inquisition."

Nevertheless, now that his suspicions were aroused, he made sure that his coat, in which he had hidden the secret packet, was still on the clothes peg next his rapier, within easy reach of his hand. As a final precaution he drew forth the pistols, and, making sure that they were primed, placed them ostentatiously on each side of his plate.

Having done this, he received with enthusiasm the tasty roast which his host brought in, and proceeded to attack it with no further delay.

"Your Excellency is a man of precaution," remarked the inn-keeper, glancing at the pistols.

"Oh, you can't be too careful these days!" answered Tancrède, his mouth quite full.

"But the country is peaceful at present. Since our wise prime minister, the great Cardinal, has rid us of the Huguenots, we have been enjoying the fruits of peace, so necessary for trade."

"To the health, then, of the Cardinal!" said the Cavalier, drinking a deep draught.

He was showing prudence and diplomacy. He had no desire to compromise himself in political matters.

"Your honor belongs to the army, without doubt?"

The Cavalier looked closely at the speaker. He had a feeling that the man was trying to get him to talk. So, being on his guard, he answered vaguely in the affirmative.

"And you are rejoining your regiment, perhaps?"

"Yes!"

"There's no finer profession than the military one! And none more glorious! Zounds! the enemies of the State felt, during the last campaign, the force of our arms!"

In pronouncing these words, the big man seemed to bubble over with patriotism. He waited with open mouth for an answer.

"Yes!" said the Cavalier.

"Yet, if this profession has its glories, it also has its disadvantages, my young lord. It brings misfortune, alas! as well as greatness."

And the kitchen philosopher sighed deeply.

"Alas!" echoed Tancrède.

"If one has had the pleasure of drawing sword against

Spain and Lorraine, it must be a sad duty to have to turn the point against French bosoms."

This time the ground was becoming dangerous. Did this impertinent walking beer-barrel dare try to sound him? So as to avoid any chance of letting slip a compromising word, the Cavalier continued busily with his eating.

The host, slightly vexed, started in again:

"And yet that is what Your Lordship has to do. I'll wager that you would rather face the Spanish in Flanders than join Marshal Châtillon at Sedan?"

The soldier pretended to choke, and shook his head with an air of distress.

"For you must surely be on your way to Sedan?"

"I am!"

"Your Lordship will then allow me to drink to your success! I hope of course that the Princes will remain loyal, and make it unnecessary to shed French blood. It is a terrible thing to fight against the King—and our wise Cardinal!"

The Cavalier, annoyed, wondered whether he shouldn't throw this pompous ass out the window. But, heroically, he overcame this desire, and, with an amiable smile, nodded to his host.

The latter had taken off his white hat, and cried with enthusiasm:

"To the victory of our armies! And long live Monseigneur the Cardinal-Duke!"

"To His Majesty, King Louis XIII," pronounced the Cavalier in a clear voice.

At this moment, a loud noise from the other side of the dark room made him turn around. He then perceived that he was not alone. Another diner occupied an obscure corner. The man seemed to be about to strangle from coughing. The strangeness of his dress held the Cavalier's attention.

"Your Lordship is looking at that poor devil!" whispered the inn-keeper. "He, now, is a victim of our internal dissensions."

Surprised, Tancrède looked at the gossiper with a glance that seemed to authorize him to continue.

"It's hard to believe that this poor wretch has known better days. Yet it's for that reason I let him in today, although he is a thrifty guest and spends little. As I just ventured to say, it is this present disorder which has reduced him to such a state of poverty."

"Indeed!"

"I give you my word for it. He used to be a woolstapler in Paris, living on the Rue de Grénetail . . ."

"What street?"

"Grénetail, in the quarter of Saint-Martin, at the sign of *The White Sheep!*"

"There's a strange coincidence," thought the Cavalier. "Exactly the same place where Cyrano has his lodgings!"

Now interested, he prepared to listen to every word of his garrulous host. The latter, delighted to find an audience at last, continued:

"On returning from Flanders, where he usually purchased his goods, he thought it prudent to make a detour by Ardenne, so as to avoid the war-infested provinces to the north."

"A wise precaution!"

"Alas, on the contrary, it was a disastrous inspiration. Near Sedan he was robbed by mercenaries in the pay of the Princes. Nevertheless, he managed to conceal from their avarice a few things. But he then fell into the hands of some soldiers of the Marshal, and the French despoiled him of the little that the Germans had left. So there he is, returning to Paris on foot, and reduced to these dire straits."

During this speech, the Cavalier examined more closely the man under discussion. He was a long-legged devil, all bones, with a rather proud face. He looked more the part of a follower of the broad highway than that of an honest, despoiled merchant.

Thin and emaciated, he seemed to be breaking a long fast. With the fierceness of a starved wolf, he devoured a simple meal, and his only drink had a suspicious resemblance to clear water. The compassionate young soldier surveyed his own table, groaning under its load of dainty food and delicious wines. He began to feel almost ashamed of his lavishness.

"Come, my good host," he suggested, "ask this honest fellow to share my dinner. After all, we Christians must help one another!"

The inn-keeper did not wait to have the suggestion repeated. Being a good business man who enjoyed making a double profit, he hastened to extend the invitation to the pretended wool-stapler. The latter arose quickly, and, with many bows and effusive thanks, which the young man waved gallantly aside, sat down opposite his benefactor.

Then, without further ado, the stranger began to empty plates and bottles in a furious haste. No, all of the host's story could not have been fabricated.

Tancrède noticed one thing; while eating, the man kept looking from door to window with anxious glances, and listened to the slightest noise. This strange by-play gave the man the air of a hunted, famished beast with two equally strong instincts: one, to relieve his hunger at any cost; the other, to fly the approach of the hunter. This constant uneasiness increased as the meal advanced. Gradually his appetite lessened and the instinct of preservation gained the upper hand.

The host retired, after carving and serving the fowl. The strange guest quickly put his hand on the Cavalier's arm, and said confidentially:

"My young lord, in return for your kind invitation, I will give you some good advice."

This mysterious prologue interested the young soldier. The other continued:

"You have just made a serious mistake."

"Come, what the . . ."

"A while ago, when talking to our host, you said something quite unwise. That was why I coughed, so as to warn you."

"Something unwise? It could only have been 'yes' or 'no.' I surely said nothing else."

"You replied to a toast to the Cardinal by proposing the health of the King."

"Is that all? It seems to me I was only acting the part of a good Frenchman and a faithful subject."

"*Tudieu!* This is an uncertain time we're living in. To every follower of the Cardinal there is only one King, the great Richelieu! To proclaim 'Long live the King,' is to utter a seditious cry."

This reply was too paradoxical. The Cavalier burst out laughing:

"*Peste!* Apparently you don't seem to share our host's love for the great man."

"Shh!" warned the stranger, whose suspicious glance turned toward the door, as he listened anxiously.

"Come, my good fellow, explain yourself, because, in all truth, you will end by alarming me yet."

"Listen! As soon as I heard your ill-timed proposal of the health, I recognized you as one of us. I had already become suspicious when I heard your embarrassed explanation of your presence on this road to Sedan, which leads to the army of the Princes."

"Doesn't it also lead to the camp of Marshal Châtillon?" asked the young man, mistrustful of the stranger.

"Of course, only your conduct shows that you cannot be going there! Aha! Since when has it been customary for a soldier returning from leave to have such a sumptuous meal, and to protect himself by putting horse-pistols on the table beside him?"

The Cavalier blushed. His prudence, in its very excess, had been unsuccessful on the very first test. Mortified, he asked:

"Well, in your opinion where am I going?"

"To join the Princes!" stated the other with a sly wink.

"Clothes don't make the man! In spite of your military uniform, I suspect that you are a nobleman in disguise."

Fearing a trap, the Cavalier shook his head.

"No! No! Don't laugh, my dear young lord. You have there a ring which tells a different story."

The man pointed to the gold ring which the Duchess had put on Tancrède's finger at the moment of separation.

The Cavalier was wondering in what snare he was being trapped, when, to his amazement, he saw his strange guest draw out of his pocket an identical ring.

Then, with a laugh which showed his large, horse-like teeth, the man added:

"You see now you are among friends. You, perhaps, are in the service of Madame the Duchess; I am in that of Their Highnesses the Princes."

The soldier was too young a conspirator to be able to cover up his astonishment. The stranger took advantage of his silence to continue in a loquacious manner:

"But, *parbleu*, it is fitting that I should present myself. My name cannot be unknown to you, as it has caused some stir in the world."

And, again glancing around cautiously, he said:

"I am Jean-Baptiste l'Hermitte, Sieur de Vauselle! from which you may know that, in spite of my present poverty, I can sit at your table as an equal. In my veins flows the blood of Peter the Hermit, the glorious preacher, and of the Counts of Barcelona. I am thus a cousin of His Catholic Majesty, the King of Spain."

Having given this astonishing pedigree all in one breath, the cousin of Spanish royalty remained silent, waiting for the Cavalier in turn to present himself. But the latter, determined to preserve his incognito, merely bowed his head in recognition.

The Sieur de Vauselle, eye and ear always on the alert, began again with a slight air of pique:

"I shall not ask your name, since it appears that you prefer to remain anonymous."

"Believe me, Monsieur, it is merely a scruple of precaution—not a sign of my lack of confidence in you."

"So I shall take it," said Vauselle, whose loquacity and watchfulness did not keep him from drinking cup after cup of wine, as if, in spite of his high descent, he had not been present at such a feast in years. "Therefore I shall not insist. It is sufficient to know that we are of the same race and of the same party. Because, on the word of a gentleman, famished as I was, I should never have shared that roast fowl with a Cardinalist."

"Oh, I did not know that politics had even invaded the barnyard!"

"I wish to let you profit by my experience," continued Vauselle, paying no attention to the bantering interruption. "Of course you didn't believe a word of our host's story. I am not a wool-stapler and I have never been fleeced!"

The Cavalier did not need this assurance to be convinced of the impossibility of the inn-keeper's story. Indeed, now that he looked more closely at Vauselle's face, he felt that this man was more likely to do the fleecing.

"What has reduced me to this predicament is having to escape from a cursed spy set upon me by the Cardinal. He has followed me from Sedan to Châlons. Three days ago I was able to give the slip to this limb of Satan. I managed to escape down a little cross-road just as he was about to hand me over to a troop of dragoons. Since then I have been wandering through forests, daring to travel only at night. My purse and good horse have had to go to greedy peasants as the price of their silence."

"The devil! for three days—I understand now your appetite."

"Today, at last, I ventured to take a chance on coming to this tempting hostel, where my lucky star let me find a generous host. Yet, modest as my meal was, I did not know how I was to pay for it."

"You were scarcely prudent, I think."

"Well, what could you expect? Hunger drives the wolf from the forest."

"Well," said the Cavalier, "I'll settle your account with mine—and let me give you these few gold pieces to enable you to reach Paris."

With his left hand Vauselle made a modest gesture of refusal, while his right hand seized greedily the coins, which he buried in the depths of his pocket.

"It's anti-cardinalist gold," he said. "Therefore I shall accept it."

"Now it is my turn," said the Cavalier, "to thank you for your words of advice. I take it that the main thing is to avoid spies."

"The road is thick with them; they seem to jump out from behind every stone," remarked Vauselle, filling himself another cup.

"Good heavens!" said the Cavalier, as if talking to himself, "that Capuchin I saw a while ago looked like a queer one."

Vauselle, who was lifting the cup to his lip, stopped short, pale and trembling.

"A Capuchin?" he cried.

"A big, fat Capuchin. He's roaming around the neighborhood. I caught him talking to our host."

"A Capuchin mounted on a mule?"

"Mounted? No! He had dismounted from it!"

In the twinkling of an eye Vauselle was on his feet. Staring wildly with his frightened eyes, he groaned:

"Oh, heaven have pity! It's he! Father Hilarion—my man of Châlons."

Without losing a second he seized a coat. Then, pulling his hat over his eyes, he rushed to the door.

"Ho! there. Not so fast!" cried the Cavalier, "that's my coat you're runnnig off with."

He seized the fugitive by the tail of the coat, and quickly regained his garment.

Bewildered, Vauselle took his cape, with a sigh of regret as he looked at its mud-stains and tattered edges. Then he opened the door of the court-yard. The ruddy face and large belly of the monk filled the doorway. Seeing him, Vauselle leaped back, and with a quick about-face and a suppleness of movement that amazed the young soldier, leaped over tables and stools, opened the window, and jumped out with the agility of a cat. The fat monk raced after him. But the overturned furniture impeded his progress, and he reached the window in time to catch—the breeze!

This scene passed rapidly before the eyes of the amused Cavalier. Suddenly he heard the sound of a galloping horse, and, through the open window, saw Vauselle ride furiously by toward Paris in a cloud of dust. He burst out laughing at the discomfited figure of the Cardinal's spy, but the laugh was strangled in his throat. On the road the host, followed by the groom, was running furiously after the horseman, crying:

"Stop thief! Stop thief!"

"*Morbleu!*" exclaimed the Cavalier, "the scoundrel has stolen *Capitan!*"

He in turn jumped out the window, and rushed madly in pursuit of the thief. But an unexpected sight induced him to follow a more prudent course. Coming up the road in the opposite direction was a troop of dragoons, going at a fast trot. When they were within hailing distance, Father Hilarion leaned out the window, and cried:

"Go on, at a gallop! He's just slipped through my fingers!"

With his forefinger he pointed out, in the direction of Paris, a black spot on the road—all that could be seen of Vauselle, and of the splendid Spanish jennet! The dragoons started off at full gallop in pursuit of the fugitive.

The Cavalier felt the cold sweat running down his back. He had been just about to fall into a trap as these dragoons were undoubtedly on his trail. Luckily Vauselle had created a diversion, and saved him from pursuit. Yes, he had been fortunate to escape all the way through. But for his good luck his coat, with its priceless treasure would be gone also.

"I'll never leave anything in a coat again," he swore solemnly to himself. "It's too dangerous!"

Determined to exercise more prudence in the future, the soldier paid his reckoning and inquired of his host where he could purchase a horse. There was none to be had in the neighborhood. He would have to recross the river, and descend to Saint-Maur to make such a purchase.

The Cavalier, sorely vexed, not knowing what to do next, was walking with bowed head toward the door, when he suddenly found himself confronted by an object difficult to pass. It was the imposing figure of the jolly friar. Since the departure of the dragoons, the good father had not ceased to watch him, and, at the opportune moment, had come forward.

"I say, wait a minute, my young friend! That was your horse?"

"Yes, worthy father," answered the Cavalier, as he tried once again to pass by this obstacle.

"H'm! Fine animal! It must have cost you a pretty penny?"

The Cavalier, impatient, answered as if it were a joke:

"It's a present from a lovely lady who has been kind enough to take an interest in me."

"And that was your dinner?" asked the monk, pointing with an accusing finger toward the empty bottles and the scattered remains of food.

"Quite likely!"

"*Peste!* sir soldier, you don't care about expense! That also, I suppose, was a present?"

The young man bit his lips.

"Another present, that purse full of gold I saw just now?"

"Yes!" said the Cavalier, clenching his fists, "I see nothing escapes you. It is another present."

"Happy youth! You have a mistress there whom it pays to serve faithfully," was the monk's bantering reply, as he still blocked the doorway.

The features of the Cavalier suddenly relaxed, and he assumed his most engaging smile.

"Oh, you haven't seen the half yet, my dear father!"

"Well, well, and what else has this amiable lady given to her handsome young cavalier?"

"This, and that," said the soldier, as beneath the nose of the thunderstruck monk, he roughly thrust the barrels of his two pistols.

"Come now, be careful!" exclaimed the monk, jumping to one side.

"You see, there is a pair of them!" the Cavalier said pleasantly.

At the same time, levelling the weapons at the large target of the monk's belly, he forced his trembling adversary to the back of the room. There he stripped him of his girdle, and used it to bind firmly his arms. The prisoner made a movement of resistance, but the touch of the cold barrel of a pistol on his cheek made him change his mind. Swiftly, with the help of a napkin, he rendered him completely helpless by binding his legs.

Still exercising the greatest precaution, he stuffed another napkin into the monk's mouth as a gag. After that operation, the soldier tied the prisoner to the railing of the staircase. The poor Capuchin now looked as formless as a carelessly tied bundle.

As a final precaution the Cavalier closed and bolted the window, then locked the door into the kitchen. Surveying his completed task in a pleased manner, he bowed humbly in front of the helpless monk whose eyes bulged with terror.

"A thousand pardons for having to leave your most agreeable company," he said, "but I am expected somewhere else. Unfortunately my horse has been stolen, so I trust that you will allow me to borrow your mule. I shall exchange it at the next stage for a more suitable mount, and will leave orders for it to be returned to you.

"Farewell, reverend sir, I will not ask for your blessing. My regards to your master, the Cardinal, and may God preserve the health of that great Frenchman!"

After this little speech, the Cavalier walked insolently out. He bolted and locked the door behind him, slipping the key into his pocket, and then proceeded to the stables.

On the threshold of *The Shield of France*, the host, surrounded by several idlers, was commenting on the amazing disappearance of the wool-stapler.

As he passed in front of the inn-keeper, the young soldier stopped the mule. He noted with amusement the good man's amazement as he beheld him seated on the Capuchin's steed. The Cavalier, assuming a peremptory tone, said:

"Oh ho, my friend! It seems that you receive here the enemies of the King, and that you aid their flight by furnishing them with the horses of good Cardinalists!"

His menacing air, as the host tried to protest, caused the miserable man to tremble. But the Cavalier withered him with a terrifying look.

"Hold your tongue, my good man! And if you value your skin, don't stick your nose into this affair. Above all, do not disturb the holy man. He has remained in the dining-room to pray, and does not wish to be disturbed for half an hour. You understand?"

The Cavalier supported his speech with a double argument, as he uncovered the barrels of the pistols, and let fall several pieces of money.

The host, terrified, dropped to his knees:

"I understand, Monseigneur!" he gasped.

"In the service of His Eminence the Cardinal!" exclaimed the young man, settling himself firmly in the saddle. "Not a word!"

Laughing noiselessly to himself, he urged on the mule.

The host of *The Shield of France*, dazed and overwhelmed, commented to himself upon the strange guests he had been receiving. Three of them had arrived: one on a horse, the second on a mule, the third on foot. And now, the pedestrian had left on the horse, the horseman on the mule, and as for the third man, he did not know how he would depart—if ever!

END OF

The Mysterious Cavalier

THE NEXT VOLUME IN THE SERIES IS "MARTYR TO THE QUEEN"

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